Following in the Buddha's Footsteps

The Dalai Lama with Thubten Chodron

The Library of Wisdom and Compassion : Volume 4

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THE LIBRARY OF WISDOM AND COMPASSION • VOLUME 4

Following in the Buddha's Footsteps

Bhikṣu Tenzin Gyatso,
the Fourteenth Dalai Lama

and

Bhikṣuṇī Thubten Chodron

"This authoritative volume serves as a rich source of information on two major themes — the bases of Buddhist faith and the framework of Buddhist training — each viewed from the two complementary perspectives of the Pali tradition and the Indo-Tibetan tradition."

— BHIKKHU BODHI, scholar-monk and translator of Pali texts

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— JETSUNMA TENZIN PALMO,
founding abbess of Dongyu Gatsal Ling Nunnery

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Preface

ALTHOUGH EACH VOLUME of the *Library of Wisdom and Compassion* can be read separately, the topics in them are arranged in a particular sequence so that each subsequent volume builds on the preceding one. The first volume, *Approaching the Buddhist Path*, and part of the second volume, *The Foundation of Buddhist Practice*, contain introductory topics that are helpful to know before engaging in further study. Calling them introductory doesn't mean they are elementary or easy; rather they are the basis of what will follow.

The second volume then continues, speaking about precious human life, its rarity and value, and urging us to take advantage of the opportunity it affords, since our lives are comparatively short and we will be reborn. Because effects arise from their causes, our future lives will depend on the causes we create now — our karma or actions. An extensive explanation of karma and its effects concludes this volume.

Volume 3, *Saṃsāra, Nirvāṇa, and Buddha Nature*, contains an in-depth discussion of the cycle of constantly recurring rebirth in which we are bound under the control of ignorance, afflictions, and polluted karma. It investigates buddha nature — the nature of our minds that provides the potential to become fully awakened buddhas.

That brings us to this fourth volume, *Following in the Buddha's Footsteps*, which begins with the topic of turning to the Three Jewels — the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha — for spiritual guidance. Taking refuge in the Three Jewels is the mark of becoming a Buddhist, and the guidance the Buddha gives us is to practice the three higher trainings in ethical conduct, concentration, and wisdom.

In most presentations of the lamrim (stages of the path), which were written for Tibetans who were already Buddhists, the topic of refuge comes earlier — after considering our possible future rebirths. This occurs for two reasons. First, refuge is the initial

protective measure enabling us to avoid unfortunate rebirths. Second, increasing our faith and trust in the Buddha facilitates our understanding and practice of the law of karma and its effects. This is because we depend on the Buddha's word to understand the subtle and obscure aspects of karma and its effects.

My observation — and that of many fellow Western Dharma students — is that people who did not grow up Buddhist are eager to learn about karma and its results but need more time to understand the meaning of taking refuge in the Three Jewels. We want to understand clearly what are the Three Jewels and what are the advantages and meaning of taking refuge in them. For this reason, the explanation of refuge in this volume is fuller than in most lamrim texts. It includes Dharmakīrti's argument on why the Buddha is a reliable teacher and Maitreya's explanation of how the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha individually and together guide us on the path to liberation and full awakening.

In volume 3, we discussed the āryas' four truths. The last two, true cessations and true paths, are the Dharma Jewel. The Dharma Jewel is the actual refuge, for when generated in our mindstream, awakening dawns. By actualizing a portion of true cessations and true paths, we become the Saṅgha Jewel, and by realizing them fully, we are transformed into the Buddha Jewel. This is possible because the buddha nature is an inalienable quality of our mind. Our actualizing the Three Jewels is the fulfillment of our buddha nature, which has been completely purified and brought to perfection.

With this background, the present volume elaborates on the true cessations and true paths spoken of in volume 3 by beginning with a more in-depth explanation of the Three Jewels of refuge. The Dharma Jewel of true paths includes the āryas' three higher trainings in ethical conduct, concentration, and wisdom, which are also revealed in this volume. Ethical conduct as practiced by monastics and lay followers comes first. Here we hear His Holiness's love and respect for the Vinaya — monastic discipline — and for the monastic community and its role in preserving the Dharma. This is followed by instructions on how to cultivate meditative concentration, explained from the perspective of both

the Sanskrit and Pāli traditions. While the lamrim usually discusses this in the context of the perfection of meditative stability, it makes sense to include it in the higher training in concentration so practitioners can begin to improve their concentration now. The higher training in wisdom comes next. Here we delve into the thirty-seven harmonies with awakening, practices found in both the Sanskrit and Pāli traditions. This volume is rich in teachings to practice that will definitely transform our minds.

How This Volume Came About

The Library of Wisdom and Compassion came about when I requested His Holiness to write a brief root text for Tibetan geshes and khenpos to use when teaching in the West. His Holiness said we should write the elaborate explanation first and gave me transcripts of his teachings to work from. Several series of interviews happened over the years. In 2006 His Holiness said that this series must be unique — it should not be a rewording of previous lamrim texts — and insisted that material from the Pāli and Chinese Buddhist traditions be added.

Why would someone who has spent his life studying and practicing the Sanskrit tradition as presented in Tibet want to encourage his students and those interested in Buddhism to learn the Pāli tradition and Chinese Buddhism? His Holiness is open-minded and sees all these teachings as coming from the same Teacher, the Buddha. He knows a fair bit about other Buddhist traditions and is strongly opposed to sectarianism. His wish is for all Buddhist traditions to cooperate, have fruitful exchanges, and work together for the betterment of the world. Since all Buddhist traditions are present in the West, this is especially important. While not ignoring the differences in presentation and emphasis, His Holiness wants us to enhance our Dharma practices by learning from one another.

Charging me with adding teachings from the Pāli tradition and Chinese Buddhism, he also insisted, contrary to my wishes, that the book be coauthored and gave me permission to alter the usual order of the topics to suit this audience: people who were not

brought up Buddhist, as well as Asians — especially young Tibetans — with a modern education.

Having received bhikṣuṇī ordination in Taiwan, lived with Chinese Buddhists in Singapore, and gone on pilgrimage in Tibet, Mainland China, and Taiwan, I was familiar with Chinese Buddhists and knew scholars and practitioners who could teach me more. Fortunately I also knew many Theravāda Buddhists from my time in Singapore and from the annual Western Buddhist Monastic Gatherings in the United States. I spent some time studying and meditating at a wat in Thailand and diligently studied Bhikkhu Bodhi's talks on the Majjhima Nikāya, reading portions of the Vinaya and the other nikāyas in the Pāli canon as well as supplementary material.

The journey into other Buddhist traditions enriched my practice tremendously. I came to have a deep appreciation for the Buddha's skill as a teacher and the many ways he made the Dharma available so that living beings with different inclinations and interests could find what they needed in his teachings.

In 2018 I had another series of interviews with His Holiness, and I'd like to share a touching story that illustrates His Holiness's compassion in teaching us. We were completing a long discussion on how bodhisattvas generate the meditative absorptions of the form and formless realms, when His Holiness said, "I don't give a lot of thought to the meditative absorptions, though I would like to develop the capable preparation and use that to enter the path of preparation. I'm not expecting to attain buddhahood soon. Does that seem lazy? However, there are numerous buddhas in the ten directions, but do they come to help? As long as I have a polluted body, my wish is to serve sentient beings, and practically speaking, I can do that. I often contemplate Śāntideva's verses (BCA 3.21, 10:55):

> Just like the earth and space itself,
>
> and all the other mighty elements,
>
> for boundless multitudes of beings,

may I always be the ground of life, the source of varied
sustenance.

For as long as space endures

and as long as living beings remain,

until then may I too abide

to dispel the misery of the world."

How to Approach These Teachings

His Holiness's teaching style is unique: he weaves easy-to-understand advice that relates to our daily life together with complex teachings that pertain to practitioners who have studied and practiced for many years (and lifetimes). In addition, Buddhist teachers in general don't expect us to remember and understand everything the first or even second time we hear or read it. Rather, each time we study the same material new understandings are revealed because our mind has matured. So if some of the material seems difficult to understand or too advanced for your present level, keep going. Remember that you are "planting seeds" in your mindstream that will yield deeper and more precise understanding in the future.

Please Note

Although this series is coauthored, the vast majority of the material is His Holiness's teachings. I researched and wrote the parts about the Pāli tradition, wrote some other passages, and composed the reflections. For ease of reading, most honorifics have been omitted, but that does not diminish the great respect we have for these most excellent sages and practitioners. Foreign terms are given in italics parenthetically at their first usage. Unless otherwise noted with "P" or "T," indicating Pāli or Tibetan, respectively, italicized terms are Sanskrit. When two italicized terms are listed, the first is Sanskrit, the second Pāli. For consistency, Sanskrit spelling is used for Sanskrit and Pāli terms used in common language (nirvāṇa,

Dharma, arhat, and so forth), except in citations from Pāli scriptures. The term *śrāvaka* encompasses solitary realizers, unless there is reason to specifically differentiate them. To maintain the flow of a passage, it is not always possible to gloss all new terms on their first use; a glossary is provided at the end of the book. "Sūtra" often refers to Sūtrayāna and "Tantra" to Tantrayāna — the Sūtra Vehicle and Tantra Vehicle, respectively. When these two words are not capitalized, they refer to two types of discourses: sūtras and tantras. Mahāyāna here refers principally to the bodhisattva path as explained in the Sanskrit tradition. Unless otherwise noted, all explanations and the meaning of all terms accord with the Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka presentation. Unless otherwise noted, the personal pronoun "I" refers to His Holiness.

Appreciation

My deepest respect goes to Śākyamuni Buddha and all the buddhas, bodhisattvas, and arhats who embody the Dharma and with compassion teach us unawakened beings. I also bow to all the realized lineage masters of all Buddhist traditions through whose kindness the Dharma still exists in our world.

This series appears in many volumes, so I will express appreciation to those involved in each individual volume. This volume, the fourth in the *Library of Wisdom and Compassion*, is due to the talents and efforts of His Holiness's translators — Geshe Lhakdor, Geshe Dorji Damdul, and Mr. Tenzin Tsepak. I am grateful to Geshe Dorji Damdul, Geshe Dadul Namgyal, and Ven. Sangye Khadro for checking the manuscript, and to Samdhong Rinpoche, Geshe Sonam Rinchen, Geshe Loyang, and Geshe Ngawang Sangye for clarifying important points. I also thank Bhikkhu Bodhi for his clear teachings on the Pāli tradition and for generously answering my many questions. He also kindly looked over the sections of the book on the Pāli tradition before publication. The staff at the Private Office of His Holiness facilitated the interviews, and Sravasti Abbey kindly supported me while I worked on this volume. Mary Petrusewicz skillfully edited this book. I thank everyone at Wisdom Publications who

contributed to the successful production of this series. All errors are my own.

Bhikṣuṇī Thubten Chodron
Sravasti Abbey

Abbreviations

Translations used in this volume, unless noted otherwise, are as cited here. Some terminology has been modified for consistency with the present work.

ADK *Treasury of Knowledge* (*Abhidharmakośa*), by Vasubandhu

AN Aṅguttara Nikāya. Translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi in *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2012).

BCA *Engaging in the Bodhisattvas' Deeds* (*Bodhicaryāvatāra*), by Śāntideva.

C. Chinese

DN Dīgha Nikāya. Translated by Maurice Walshe in *The Long Discourses of the Buddha* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995).

DV *Dharmaguptaka Vinaya: Bhikṣuṇī Poṣadha and Rites to Establish the Territory* (Newport, WA: Sravasti Abbey, 2017).

EBM *The Essentials of Buddhist Meditation*, by Zhiyi. Translated by Bhikṣu Dharmamitra (Seattle, WA: Kalavinka Press, 2008).

EPL *Elucidating the Path to Liberation: A Study of the Commentary on the Abhidharmakosa*, by the First Dalai Lama. Translated by David Patt. PhD dissertation, University of Wisconsin–Madison, 1993.

ISBP *The Inner Science of Buddhist Practice*, by Artemus B. Engle (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 2009).

LC *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path* (T. *Lam rim chen mo*), by Tsongkhapa, 3 vols. Translated by Joshua Cutler et al. (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 2000–4).

LS *Praise to the Supramundane* (*Lokātītastava*), by Nāgārjuna.

MMA *Supplement to the "Middle Way"* (*Madhyamakāvatāra*). Translated by George Churinoff and Thubten Jampa. Unpublished manuscript reprinted by ILTK Masters Program, Pomaia, Italy, 2013.

MMAB Candrakīrti. *Explanation of the "Supplement to the 'Middle Way'"* (*Madhyamakāvatārabhāṣya*). Translated by George Churinoff and Thubten Jampa. Unpublished manuscript reprinted by ILTK Masters Program, Pomaia, Italy, 2013.

MMK *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, by Nāgārjuna.

MN Majjhima Nikāya. Translated by Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi in *The Middle-Length Discourses of the Buddha* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995).

NSP *Nāgārjuna on the Six Perfections*. Translated by Bhikṣu Dharmamitra (Seattle, WA: Kalavinka Press, 2009).

P. Pāli

PDA *Praise to Dependent Arising* (T. *rten 'brel bstod pa*), by Tsongkhapa. Translated by Thubten Jinpa. http://www.tibetanclassics.org/html-assets/In%20Praise%20of%20Dependent%20Origination.pdf.

PV *Commentary on the "Compendium of Reliable Cognition"* (*Pramāṇavārttika*), by Dharmakīrti.

PVS *The Twenty-Five-Thousand-Verse Perfection of Wisdom Sūtra* (T. *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā-prajñā-pāramitā Sūtra*).

RA *Ratnāvalī* (*Precious Garland*) by Nāgārjuna.

RGV *Sublime Continuum* (*Ratnagotravibhāga*, *Uttaratantra*), by Maitreya.

Sn Suttanipāta. Translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi in *The Suttanipāta* (Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2017).

SN Saṃyutta Nikāya. Translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi in *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2000).

ŚS *Śikṣasamuccaya*, by Śāntideva. Translated by B. Alan Wallace. Wisdom Academy, 2018.

STG *Sūtra on the Ten Grounds* in The Tog Palace Manuscript of the Tibetan Kangyur.

T. Tibetan

Vism *Visuddhimagga*, by Buddhaghosa. Translated by Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli in *The Path of Purification* (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1991).

1 | Trustworthy Spiritual Guidance

WHAT MAKES our spiritual practice Buddhist? It is not merely doing practices taught in Buddhist scriptures, for some of those practices — such as refraining from harming others, cultivating love and compassion, and developing concentration — are also found in other religions. Doing these and other practices with a mind that has taken refuge in the Three Jewels is the key that makes these practices Buddhist. Taking refuge means we entrust ourselves for spiritual guidance to the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha. Based on knowledge of their qualities, we choose to follow their guidance.

The Entrance to the Buddhist Path

Our ultimate goal is to become the Three Jewels ourselves. To do this, we need to rely on the guidance of the Three Jewels that already exist. To actualize the Dharma Jewel — which as true cessation and true path is the ultimate refuge — in our own mindstream, we take refuge in the Buddha as the one who taught the Dharma and in the Saṅgha as the ones who have actualized some true cessations and true paths in their mindstream.

Taking refuge is not simply reciting "I take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha" with our mouths. It involves an internal commitment to our spiritual practice that motivates us to humbly seek spiritual guidance. Refuge is to be lived each moment, so that all the practices we do are directed toward actualizing the Dharma Jewel in our mindstream. When we have done this, we will have genuine, lasting joy and fulfillment, and our lives will have become highly meaningful. To attain nirvāṇa, we must start practicing now.

Based on his own experience, the Buddha taught a path in accord with reality. He did not teach anything illogical or contradictory to the laws of nature or the way things are. Through his teachings and his living example, he demonstrated the ability to eliminate unrealistic and harmful mental states — such as ignorance, animosity, and attachment — from their root and to develop good qualities limitlessly. All of this accords with the way things function, and by practicing the Buddha's instructions

we can verify the path to awakening and its resultant awakening through our own experience.

Some people read the biographies of the Buddha or other Buddhist sages and, inspired by their sublime lives, follow their teachings. That is wonderful. But the most important reason for following the Buddha's teachings is that we have studied and investigated them and have found them to be reliable and effective. In this way, we confirm for ourselves that the Buddha's philosophical teachings are the result of deep contemplation, sincere practice, and genuine meditation. They were not made up quickly to impress others. The faith that arises from understanding the teachings is stable and reliable, whereas the faith that derives from admiration of the Buddha's life or amazement at his supernormal abilities can easily change.

It is said that taking refuge in the Three Jewels is the excellent door for entering the Buddha's doctrine, renunciation of duḥkha is the door for entering a path, and bodhicitta is the door for entering the Mahāyāna. Taking refuge establishes the spiritual direction we will take in life and leads us to learn and contemplate the Buddha's teachings. Through this, we will realize that no enduring happiness is to be found in cyclic existence and we will renounce this suffering state and generate the aspiration to attain liberation. The stability of this understanding in our mind marks our entrance to a path. Stable bodhicitta is the door to enter the bodhisattva path that leads to full awakening because only this altruistic intention to attain awakening for the benefit of all sentient beings will give us the strength of mind to fulfill the collections of merit and wisdom necessary to attain full awakening.

To view this sequence in the reverse order: To attain full awakening, bodhicitta is indispensable. Bodhicitta is based on great compassion, but to feel great compassion for others, we must first have compassion for ourselves. Renunciation — wanting ourselves to be free from saṃsāra and to attain nirvāṇa — is the true meaning of self-compassion. To reach this understanding, we must be clear about our spiritual direction and the guides we rely on to lead us. Thus, taking refuge is the first step; it is the door to the Buddha's teachings.

To take refuge properly, correctly identifying and gaining a clear understanding of the Three Jewels is crucial. To do that, understanding the four truths is important, and this is based on comprehending the two truths: veiled and ultimate truths. Without comprehending the two truths, our understanding of the four truths will be hazy, and without

understanding the four truths, our refuge in the Three Jewels will not be stable.

We may wonder how we can take refuge without understanding profound and advanced topics such as the two truths, the four truths of āryas, emptiness, and dependent arising. Conversely, we may wonder how we can understand such topics without having deep refuge in the Three Jewels. By beginning with the topics of the two truths, the four truths, emptiness, and dependent arising, as we did in *Approaching the Buddhist Path*, we gain an initial understanding that forms a good foundation for taking refuge in the Three Jewels. Based on taking refuge, we then learn, contemplate, and meditate on the Buddha's teachings, and the understanding we gain from that deepens our refuge. That deeper refuge will inspire us to learn, contemplate, and meditate more, bringing even deeper understanding; and so it goes — with taking refuge and understanding the teachings aiding each other.

REFLECTION

1. Contemplate the forward sequence: taking refuge is the door to enter the Buddha's doctrine by making us receptive and giving direction to our spiritual yearnings.
2. Refuge opens our minds to contemplate duḥkha, the unsatisfactory conditions of saṃsāra. Seeing there is no final happiness to be had in saṃsāra, we renounce duḥkha and aspire for liberation. This is the door to enter the paths of the śrāvaka, solitary realizer, and bodhisattva.
3. Seeing that all sentient beings, who have been kind to us in our beginningless lifetimes, are trapped in saṃsāra, we cultivate great compassion and aspire for full awakening in order to help them escape from saṃsāra. This bodhicitta motivation is the door to the Mahāyāna. Motivated and informed by bodhicitta, we generate the wisdom realizing the emptiness of inherent existence, which removes all obscurations and enables us to attain buddhahood.
4. Contemplate the reverse sequence, seeing that realization of emptiness on the Mahāyāna path is fueled by bodhicitta, which is generated through having great compassion for all living beings. This, in turn, depends on having the aspiration for ourselves to be free from saṃsāra, which relies on having taken refuge in the Three Jewels.

Reasons for Taking Refuge in the Three Jewels

As with any produced phenomenon, taking refuge occurs due to the coming together of its own causes and conditions. The first cause is being alarmed by the possibility of our misdeeds ripening in unfortunate rebirths in future lives. This is the basic, most immediate reason that leads

us to seek spiritual protection and guidance. As we progress and our understanding of the Buddha's teachings increases, we become alarmed at being subject to the various kinds of duḥkha of cyclic existence in general and seek refuge from those.

The second cause is having faith and confidence in the ability of the Three Jewels to guide us from these dangers. Such confidence is based on understanding the qualities and abilities of the Three Jewels and how they are able to guide and protect us from these dangers.

Those inclined to the Bodhisattva Vehicle cultivate a third cause: great compassion for sentient beings and the wish to alleviate their duḥkha. Since the main audience in this series is disciples with sharp faculties who aspire for buddhahood, we must seek refuge with the aspiration to become a buddha in order to have all the necessary qualities to most effectively benefit all sentient beings. Even if this bodhicitta motivation is fabricated at present, by continued cultivation it will eventually become spontaneous. We seek refuge in the Three Jewels that embody the spiritual aims we aspire for and that we regard as reliable guides to show us the path.

In the first three volumes of this series, the first cause — alarm at the prospect of experiencing unfortunate rebirths and the duḥkha of saṃsāra — has been described in depth. We will now look at the way the Fundamental Vehicle, Perfection Vehicle, and Vajra Vehicle delineate the Three Jewels, and then we will examine the qualities of the Buddha in particular and the reason the Buddha is an excellent guide. The readers of this series are intelligent, and I am confident that by analyzing and contemplating the Three Jewels you will come to well-formed conclusions.

REFLECTION

Contemplate the causes to take refuge in the Three Jewels:

1. Reflect on the faults of rebirth in unfortunate realms and in cyclic existence in general, as explained in volumes 1 and 2.
2. Reflect on the excellent qualities of the Three Jewels that make them trustworthy objects of refuge (you can read ahead to learn these).
3. With compassion for others who are bound to saṃsāra by afflictions and karma, generate the aspiration for full awakening.
4. With relief and confidence, turn to the Three Jewels as reliable guides to actualize your spiritual aims.

The Mind's Potential and the Existence of the Three Jewels

Before discussing the qualities of the Three Jewels, it is helpful to know the mind's potential and how mental purification occurs. These points were covered in chapter 12 of *The Foundation of Buddhist Practice*, and we will briefly review them now.

The greatest potential each sentient being has is to become a fully awakened buddha who has the wisdom, compassion, and power to be of the greatest benefit to all sentient beings. A key quality of a buddha is omniscience. How is attaining omniscience possible given our current state of ignorance? The mind has the natural capacity to cognize objects, but various obstructions prevent it from knowing phenomena. (1) An intervening object, like a wall, prevents us from seeing what is on the other side. (2) The object is very far away or very small and is not within the purview of our sense faculties. (3) Our cognitive faculties are defective or limited in their scope — for example, our visual consciousness cannot hear sounds; if we have severe cataracts, we can barely see; an animal brain is not equipped to comprehend philosophy. (4) A mind obscured by wrong views or one that is unable to concentrate because of an abundance of disturbing emotions cannot understand certain points. (5) Some objects are so subtle, vast, or profound that unless we have meditative concentration or superknowledges, we cannot know them. (6) The latencies of ignorance and the mistaken appearances that they cause prevent the mind from knowing both veiled truths and ultimate truths simultaneously by one consciousness.

From their side, buddhas are not limited by the above obscurations, and having perfected their virtuous qualities, they have the ability to effortlessly and spontaneously manifest in limitless ways to benefit sentient beings. However, their power is not omnipotent in the sense of being able to unilaterally control events. Our ability to be benefited by the buddhas depends on our receptivity.

Just as the sun's light radiates everywhere equally, so do buddhas' awakening activities. Nevertheless, however brilliant the sun may be, its radiance cannot enter an upside-down vessel. Similarly, our karmic obscurations or lack of merit curtail the buddhas' ability to help us. But when the vessel is turned upright, the sun naturally flows in. Similarly, when we purify our minds and accumulate merit, our minds become receptive to the buddhas' awakening activities.

As our understanding of the mind increases, we will gain conviction in three points. First, the basic nature of the mind is pure and clear. Second, afflictions are based on ignorance that apprehends phenomena as existing in the opposite way than they actually exist. Thus ignorance and the afflictions born from it are adventitious and do not inhere in the nature of the mind. Third, it is possible to cultivate powerful antidotes — realistic and beneficial mental states — that root out ignorance, afflictions, and other obscurations.

In chapter 24 of his *Treatise on the Middle Way*, Nāgārjuna explains that together, the doctrines of dependent arising and emptiness of inherent existence establish the existence of the Three Jewels. Because all phenomena arise dependently, they lack inherent existence. Ignorance, however, grasps them to exist in the opposite way, as inherently existent. Because phenomena exist dependent on other factors — sprouts depend on seeds, children depend on their parents — they do not exist independently or inherently. When wisdom realizes their emptiness, it has the power to gradually eradicate ignorance and its latencies from our minds, and thus stop our duḥkha. This wisdom is true paths, and the cessations of the afflictions and duḥkha are true cessations. More specifically, a true cessation is the purified aspect of the emptiness of a mind that has removed a portion of afflictions by means of its antidote, the true path. True paths and true cessations constitute the Dharma Jewel, and in this way the existence of the Dharma Jewel, which is the actual refuge, is established.

True paths are first generated and true cessations are first actualized on the path of seeing of all three vehicles — the Śrāvaka, Solitary Realizer, and Bodhisattva Vehicles — and they exist in the mindstreams of āryas on the paths of seeing, meditation, and no more learning. Those that have directly perceived emptiness and actualized true cessations are āryas and become the Saṅgha Jewel. When bodhisattvas overcome all obscurations, they become buddhas, the Buddha Jewel. In this way, the existence of the Three Jewels is established and the possibility of our becoming the Three Jewels is demonstrated.

When we deeply contemplate Nāgārjuna's explanation, our faith in the Three Jewels grows, not because someone told us about them or because we admire them, but because we understand the possibility of mental development that can lead to actualizing the Three Jewels ourselves. The ideal way to take refuge in the Three Jewels entails some degree of understanding of emptiness and dependent arising. Of course,

we may initially take refuge for more elementary reasons, but our refuge will deepen as our understanding of the Three Jewels increases.

Another way of speaking of the Dharma is in terms of the transmitted or scriptural Dharma and the realized Dharma. The teachings given by the Buddha are the transmitted Dharma; the realizations that arise in the minds of practitioners who practice the transmitted Dharma are the realized Dharma. Currently both the transmitted and realized Dharma are present in our world. To preserve the transmitted Dharma, we must study the Dharma by listening to oral teachings and reading scriptures, treatises, and commentaries. To preserve the realized Dharma, we must meditate and actualize these teachings in our own minds. We should not take the existence of the Dharma for granted, but make a personal contribution to preserving it.

REFLECTION

According to your present understanding, reflect that liberation is possible:

1. The basic nature of the mind is pure and clear.
2. Afflictions are based on ignorance that apprehends phenomena as existing in the opposite way than they actually exist. Thus ignorance and the afflictions born from it are adventitious and do not inhere in the nature of the mind.
3. It is possible to cultivate powerful antidotes — realistic and beneficial mental states such as the wisdom realizing emptiness — which root out ignorance, afflictions, and other obscurations.
4. Remember these three points, and as your understanding of the mind expands, come back and reflect on them again.

The Three Jewels according to the Fundamental Vehicle

According to the Fundamental Vehicle, the Buddha Jewel is the historical Buddha, Śākyamuni Buddha, who lived approximately 2,500 years ago. The Dharma is the true paths — the eightfold path of right view, intention, speech, action, livelihood, effort, mindfulness, and concentration — and true cessations in the mental continuum of an ārya. The Saṅgha refers principally to the four pairs of realized beings — the approacher and abider for stream-enterer (*srotāpanna*, *sotāpanna*), the approacher and abider for once-returner (*sakṛtāgāmi*, *sakadagāmi*) the approacher and abider for nonreturner (*anāgāmi*), and the approacher and abider for arhatship. Bodhisattvas are also included in the Saṅgha

Jewel. A commonly recited verse from the Pāli tradition expresses some of the magnificent qualities of the Three Jewels:

The Buddha, the Pure One, with ocean-deep compassion,

who possesses the eye of wonderful stainless insight,

the destroyer of worldly evil and defilement —

with devoted heart, I honor that Awakened One.

The Dhamma taught by the Master,

like a lamp that illuminates the path, fruit, and deathless nibbāna,

untouched by the conditioned world and pointing the way beyond —

with devoted heart, I honor that natural truth.

The Saṅgha, the most fertile ground for cultivation,

seers of true peace, awakened through the Sugata,

all wavering subdued, ariyas with subtle wisdom —

with devoted heart, I honor that ariya community.

The qualities of the Three Jewels are also described in the *Jewel Sutta* (*Ratana Sutta*, Sn 2.1). The Buddha delivered this sūtra when the city of Vaiśālī was subject to the triple disaster of famine, evil spirits, and plague. The citizens invited the Buddha and Saṅgha to visit to remedy the difficulties. The protective blessing arising from the Buddha teaching this sūtra and from the citizens reflecting on the qualities of the Three Jewels spread throughout the city. The triple disaster ceased and the citizens lived in peace. Verses 3–6 below encapsulate the qualities of the Three Jewels:

Whatever treasure exists here or beyond,

or whatever precious jewel is in the heavenly world,

there is none comparable to the Tathāgata.

This precious jewel is in the Buddha.

By this truth may there be safety.

The Buddha often uses the term "Tathāgata" to refer to himself. Tathāgata may be translated as the One Thus Gone, indicating that the Buddha has gone to nirvāṇa, the unconditioned state. Tathāgata can also

be translated as the One Thus Come, in that the Buddha has come to nirvāṇa in the same way all the previous buddhas have: by perfecting the thirty-seven harmonies with awakening, completing the ten perfections, and acting for the welfare of the world.

The Tathāgata has fully awakened to the nature of this world, its origin, its cessation, and the path to its cessation — that is, he fully comprehends the four truths. The Tathāgata has fully understood and can directly perceive all things that can be seen, heard, sensed, known, cognized, and thought about; he knows them just as they are. Everything he speaks, from the time he attained awakening until his parinirvāṇa, is true and correct, and his actions are consistent with his words. He has conquered the foes of the afflictions and is not conquered by them. Thereby he possesses great power to benefit the world.

The Tathāgata has realized two great principles: dependent origination and nirvāṇa. Dependent origination applies to the conditioned world and pertains particularly to true origins and true duḥkha. Nirvāṇa applies particularly to the last two truths: it is the unconditioned, true cessation that is realized by true paths. Together dependent origination and nirvāṇa include all existents.

Although there may be great wealth, treasures, and jewels in the world, none of them even come near the qualities and benefit of the Tathāgata. The Buddha is even more precious, rare, and difficult to encounter than a wish-fulfilling gem. He has the capacity to fulfill all our wishes for enduring peace and happiness through leading us on the path to nirvāṇa.

> The destruction, dispassion, deathless, and sublime
>
> discovered by the Sage of the Śākyas in samādhi —
>
> there is nothing equal to that Dhamma.
>
> This precious jewel is in the Dhamma.
>
> By this truth may there be safety.

The Dharma Jewel that is an object of refuge consists of true cessations and true paths. This verse speaks of true cessations, nirvāṇa, which is the ultimate aim of spiritual practice. Unlike the conditioned, impermanent phenomena of saṃsāra, nirvāṇa is not created by causes and conditions and does not change in each moment. Nirvāṇa has four synonyms, each describing it from a different angle: (1) it is *destruction* of craving, or of ignorance, attachment, and animosity; (2) it is *dispassion* because it is the absence of attachment, desire, greed, and lust; (3) it is

deathless because it is free from repeated birth, aging, sickness, and death in saṃsāra; (4) it is *sublime* — supreme, never-ending, and inexhaustible. Nirvāṇa is often said to be cooling because the heat of lust and mental afflictions has been extinguished, and experiencing nirvāṇa is like diving into a pool of cool water during India's hot season.

> The supreme Buddha praised that purity
>
> that is called the "uninterrupted concentration" —
>
> there exists no equal to that concentration.
>
> This precious jewel is in the Dhamma.
>
> By this truth may there be safety.

The "uninterrupted concentration" refers to the supramundane eightfold path that leads to nirvāṇa. It is called "uninterrupted" because it brings immediate results. No other path or samādhi (a state of single-pointed concentration) can equal it. To develop the supramundane eightfold path, we must first cultivate the ordinary eightfold path by practicing the four establishments of mindfulness (of body, feelings, mind, and phenomena) and developing mundane right concentration. Through these, we will gain insight, which examines the nature of the body, feelings, mind, and phenomena in a deeper way. This leads to the wisdom of clear realization (P. *abhisamaya*), which breaks through and realizes the unconditioned. Wisdom of clear realization occurs in a samādhi that is a supramundane (*lokottara*) *dhyāna*. The supramundane dhyānas may be of four levels, corresponding to the four mundane dhyānas. They are used as the basis for insight that brings the path and fruit of one of the four stages of stream-enterer and so forth. For example, if a practitioner has attained the second dhyāna and uses that to develop insight that brings the path and fruit of stream-enterer, it becomes a supramundane dhyāna, and the path and fruit are the second dhyāna supramundane path and fruit of stream-entry.

While the mind dwells in the uninterrupted concentration, wisdom actively penetrates the truth, bringing the immediate result of extinguishing certain defilements.[1] When one emerges from that concentration, one is a stream-enterer, an ārya. Unlike worldly samādhis that lead to rebirth in the form and formless realms, this samādhi leads to liberation.

The supramundane Dharma consists of the four ārya paths, their fruits, and nirvāṇa. These true cessations and true paths in the mind of the

Tathāgata are his *dharmakāya*: his Dharma body or truth body. Buddhaghosa's commentary on the Middle Length Discourses explains:

> Here the Blessed One shows [himself as] the Dhamma-body (*dhammakāya*), as stated in the passage, "The Tathāgata, great king, is the Dhamma-body." For the ninefold supramundane Dhamma is called the Tathāgata's body.[2]

To return to the *Jewel Sutta*:

> The eight persons — the four pairs — praised by the good,
>
> disciples of the Tathāgata, are worthy of offerings.
>
> What is given to them bears great fruit.
>
> This precious jewel is in the Saṅgha.
>
> By this truth may there be safety.

The ārya Saṅgha and Saṅgha Jewel refers to the eight āryas, who may be monastics or lay practitioners.[3] The conventional Saṅgha is the monastic order of fully ordained ones. The eight classes of ārya Saṅgha are subsumed in four pairs — stream-enterers, once-returners, nonreturners, and arhats. *Stream-enterers* have a clear realization of nirvāṇa; they have understood the four truths directly, made the initial breakthrough to nirvāṇa, and abandoned three of the five lower fetters (*saṃyojana*, *saṃyojana*) — view of a personal identity, doubt about the Three Jewels, and view of rules and practices.

This breakthrough or clear realization is called "the arising of the Eye of Dharma" — one now sees the Dharma and the truth of the Buddha's teaching. Because of the power of this realization, it is impossible for a stream-enterer to do any of the five heinous actions: killing his mother, killing his father, killing an arhat, causing a schism in the Saṅgha, or drawing blood from a buddha. Stream-enterers are endowed with virtue and observe ethical conduct well. Lay stream-enterers keep the five precepts and monastic stream-enterers keep monastic precepts. While they may still commit transgressions — such as angrily speaking harshly — they never conceal their transgressions and confess and make amends as soon as possible.

Because stream-enterers' faith in the Three Jewels is unshakable, they are firmly planted on the path to liberation. Some may attain arhatship in that very life, as did Sāriputta and Moggallāna, Ānanda, and many others. If not, they will be reborn in cyclic existence, but only as humans or devas, never in unfortunate realms. Stream-enterers with sharp faculties will take

only one more rebirth, those of middle faculties will take two to six rebirths, and those of dull faculties will take at most seven more rebirths before attaining nirvāṇa. Stream-enterers with dull and modest faculties are not immune to the eight worldly concerns, and sometimes their behavior may resemble that of ordinary beings. Stream-enterers who are householders may marry and be attached to their families; they may enjoy praise, compete in business deals, and become angry when criticized. Nevertheless their afflictions are weaker than those of people who are not āryas.

Once-returners have significantly reduced, though not totally eliminated, their ignorance, attachment, and animosity and will be reborn in the desire realm only once more. *Nonreturners* have abandoned the fetters of desire and malice and will never again take rebirth in the desire realm. If they don't attain nirvāṇa in that life, they will be reborn in a pure abode in the form realm and attain nirvāṇa there. *Arhats* have eliminated the remaining fetters of desire for existence in the form and formless realms, conceit, restlessness, and ignorance.

Each of these four pairs has two phases: the path and the fruit. The phase of the path is the time one practices to attain the fruit that is certain to be attained in that very life. The phase of the fruit is the time of breaking through and attaining that result. All four pairs are called *śrāvaka* (P. *sāvaka*), or disciples of the Sugata. This term literally means "hearer" because, as Buddhaghosa explains (Vism 7.90), "they hear attentively the Blessed One's instructions." However, during the Buddha's time *śrāvaka* was a more general term indicating a disciple, and the teacher of each sect had his own circle of śrāvakas, or disciples. These four pairs are the Buddha's ārya śrāvakas who, because of their spiritual realizations, are worthy of offerings and respect. As visible representatives of the ārya Saṅgha, the monastic Saṅgha are also objects of respect and offerings. Those who make offerings to them accumulate great merit that leads to fortunate rebirths and conducive circumstances for Dharma practice.

The Three Jewels according to the Perfection Vehicle

The Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha are called "jewels" because they are rare and precious — rare because they appear in the world infrequently, precious because they have the ability to lead us out of saṃsāra to liberation and full awakening. All sentient beings' virtuous attitudes, words, and deeds can be traced to the Three Jewels that continually

instruct and encourage sentient beings in virtue. The Three Jewels are more valuable than the mythical wish-fulfilling jewel because they fulfill our yearning for complete peace and freedom. They differ vastly from ordinary jewels that may temporarily improve the conditions of this life but cannot prevent or remedy all of our duḥkha. Each of the Three Jewels has an ultimate and a conventional aspect, which are presented below.

Perfection Vehicle practitioners take refuge in all buddhas throughout the universe — those living on our Earth, in other realms, and in the pure lands. In our world system Śākyamuni Buddha is the wheel-turning buddha who taught the Dharma (turned the Dharma wheel) when it was not previously present. Others have become buddhas by following his teachings. Each buddha has four buddha bodies. Here "body" means collection, as in a body of knowledge or a body of representatives. Buddha bodies may be enumerated as two, three, four, or five. These divisions involve different ways of classification but come to the same points.

There are several ways to posit the ultimate and conventional Three Jewels. The following is one way.[4]

Buddha Jewel

The *ultimate Buddha Jewel* is the truth body (*dharmakāya*), which has the nature of the perfect abandonment of all defilements and the perfect realization of all excellent qualities. It is of two types:

- The *wisdom truth body* (*jñāna dharmakāya*) is the omniscient mind of a buddha, which has three principal qualities. With *knowledge* (*jñāna*), buddhas know all phenomena; with *compassion* (*anukampā*), they seek to benefit sentient beings without hesitation; and with *power* or *ability* (T. *nus pa*), from their own side they lack all impediments to exercising their skillful means.
- The *nature truth body* (*svabhāvika dharmakāya*) is of two types:
    - The *natural stainless purity* is the emptiness of inherent existence of a buddha's mind.
    - The *purity from adventitious defilements* is a buddha's true cessations of afflictive obscurations (*kleśāvaraṇa*) that bind sentient beings to saṃsāra, and cognitive obscurations (*jñeyāvaraṇa*) that prevent them from knowing ultimate and veiled truths simultaneously with one consciousness.

The *conventional Buddha Jewel* consists of the *form bodies* (*rūpakāya*) in which a buddha appears in order to enact the welfare of sentient beings. These are of two types:

- An *enjoyment body* (*saṃbhogakāya*) is the form that a buddha manifests in his or her Akaniṣṭha pureland to teach ārya bodhisattvas.
- *Emanation bodies* (*nirmāṇakāya*) are the forms a buddha manifests that are perceivable by ordinary beings. These are of three types:
    - A *supreme emanation body* — for example, Śākyamuni Buddha — turns the Dharma wheel.
    - An *ordinary emanation body* manifests in diverse appearances of various people or things.
    - An *artisan emanation body* subdues sentient beings' minds through showing certain worldly skills.

The truth body is so-called because the wisdom truth body is the supreme *true* path and the nature truth body is the supreme *true* cessation. The dharmakāya is the fulfillment of our own purpose, in the sense that it is the total perfection of our mind. Form bodies are the fulfillment of others' purpose because through manifesting in these various forms, buddhas lead sentient beings to awakening. The truth bodies and form bodies are one inseparable entity. They are attained simultaneously at the first moment of buddhahood.

Contemplating the four buddha bodies gives us a profound understanding of Buddha Śākyamuni. His physical appearance as the human being Gautama Buddha is an emanation body, a form he assumed to suit the spiritual dispositions and interests of ordinary beings in our world. An emanation body derives from a subtler body, an enjoyment body, which emerges from the wisdom dharmakāya, a buddha's omniscient mind. A wisdom dharmakāya arises within the underlying nature of reality, a buddha's nature dharmakāya.

Dharma Jewel

The *ultimate Dharma Jewel* is the true cessations and true paths in the mindstreams of āryas.

The *generally accepted Dharma Jewel* consists of the transmitted Dharma — the Buddha's word (the 84,000 teachings and twelve branches

of scriptures) taught with compassion and skill from the Buddha's personal experience.

Saṅgha Jewel

The *ultimate Saṅgha Jewel* is an indivual ārya — someone who has some true cessations and true paths in their mindstream — or a group of āryas.

The *symbolic representation of the Saṅgha Jewel* is a group of four or more fully ordained monks or nuns. They have received the ethical restraints set forth by the Buddha.

The Buddha spoke of the importance of the fourfold assembly: fully ordained men and women and male and female lay practitioners who keep the five lay precepts. A group of four or more fully ordained monks (*bhikṣu*, *bhikkhu*) or four fully ordained nuns (*bhikṣuṇī*, *bhikkhunī*) is a Saṅgha, and this Saṅgha represents the Saṅgha Jewel. "Saṅgha" does not refer to a group of people who attend a Dharma center.

The description of the Three Jewels emphasizes the inner, experiential aspect of religion and spirituality. The Three Jewels that we trust to lead us to liberation and awakening are distinct from religious institutions. Although realized beings may be members of religious institutions, these institutions are often operated by ordinary beings. Our refuge must always remain purely with the Three Jewels. If it does, we will not be confused by the actions of ordinary beings. It's important to remember that not all Buddhists are buddhas.

Eight Excellent Qualities of the Buddha Jewel

Maitreya's *Sublime Continuum* (*Ratnagotravibhāga* or *Uttaratantra Śāstra*) discusses the excellent qualities of the Three Jewels according to the unique Mahāyāna perspective that is not shared by the Fundamental Vehicle. Learning and contemplating these qualities inspires our confidence and faith that they are superb, trustworthy guides on the path. Contemplating their qualities shows us the direction to take in our spiritual practice in order to actualize the Three Jewels ourselves. Giving us a vision of our potential, this overcomes the despair that lacks clear spiritual direction and dispels the thought that we have only limited purpose and potential in life.

The Buddha Jewel is a final object of refuge that possesses eight excellent qualities, such as being unconditioned and so forth. As

described in the *Sublime Continuum* (RGV 1.5):

> Unconditioned and spontaneous,
>
> not realized by other [extraneous] conditions,
>
> possessing knowledge, compassionate love, and ability,
>
> only the buddhas possess [the qualities of] the two benefits [of self and others].

The first three qualities indicate that buddhas have accomplished their own aim or purpose.

1. The excellent quality of being *unconditioned* indicates the truth body is free from arising and disintegrating. It possesses natural purity in that it has never and will never exist inherently. Buddhas have completely and directly realized this emptiness, which is naturally free from the elaborations of true existence; in the view of this pristine wisdom, there is no true existence. If true existence existed, this pristine wisdom would see it. Instead it has seen the ultimate truth, emptiness, in which all dualistic appearances have vanished, and the actual mode of existence of all phenomena is seen directly. Dualistic appearances are usually described as being of three kinds: (1) the appearance of subject and object being separate and distinct, as in, "I am realizing emptiness," (2) the appearance of inherent existence, even though this appearance is false and nothing exists inherently, and (3) the appearance of veiled phenomena — tables, trees, people, and so forth — which are not ultimate truths.

A buddha's pristine wisdom directly knowing emptiness differs from that of other āryas in that it can simultaneously perceive veiled truths and ultimate truths with one consciousness. A buddha's *pristine wisdom knowing things as they are* — that is, knowing their emptiness — is free from duality, yet veiled truths appear to it. It is free from duality with respect to its direct realization of emptiness, but it is not a pristine wisdom free from all duality, in that it also knows conventionalities.

Every consciousness of a buddha is omniscient and knows both truths simultaneously. One aspect of omniscient mind knows ultimate truths within the vanishing of all dualistic appearances, and the other aspect knows conventional truths within dualistic appearance.

2. The excellent quality of being *spontaneous* indicates that in addition to natural purity, the truth body is pure of every coarse and subtle adventitious defilement. All elaborations and conceptualizations have been pacified. Cognitive obscurations[5] hinder other āryas from effortlessly working for the welfare of sentient beings. When these are

pacified, they attain a buddha's truth body and are able to spontaneously and effortlessly accomplish all that is needed to benefit sentient beings.

3. The excellent quality of *not being realized by extraneous conditions* means a buddha's realizations cannot be completely understood by words and concepts and cannot be fathomed by sentient beings, even other āryas. Buddhas experience reality for themselves. The actual experience of knowing the ultimate truth nondually cannot be communicated to others in words, although the instructions on how to actualize this experience for oneself can. This quality that is the buddhas' pristine wisdom that knows things as they are — as empty of inherent existence — knows phenomena from the perspective of seeing the nonaffirming negative that is phenomena's ultimate truth. The emptiness of inherent existence of all persons and phenomena is this nonaffirming negative — a negation that doesn't imply anything positive in the wake of having negated the object of negation.

The next three qualities indicate that the buddhas have accomplished the purpose of others — that is, they are fully capable of benefitting others most effectively.

4. The excellent quality of *knowledge* or *intuitive wisdom* knows the variety and diversity of phenomena as well as their ultimate nature. This wisdom is experiential and effortless; it knows the veiled appearances and functions of all conventionalities everywhere and simultaneously realizes all phenomena as they actually are — their emptiness of true existence.[6]

5. The excellent quality of *compassionate love* for each and every sentient being wants all sentient beings to attain liberating insight that bestows omniscience. With wisdom and compassion buddhas show the path to those who are currently blind to it.

6. The excellent quality of *power* is a buddha's power of intuitive wisdom and compassion that liberates others. This indicates that buddhas possess the complete range of abilities to clear away sentient beings' obscurations that force them to be repeatedly reborn in saṃsāra under the control of afflictions and karma. Like a sword, a buddha's wisdom and compassion have the power to cut the root of saṃsāra; like a thunderbolt, they destroy that root and have the power to show others how to do that as well.

7. The excellent quality of *one's own benefit* fulfills a buddha's own aims in the most meaningful way. This quality subsumes the first three qualities and ensures that buddhas have eliminated everything to be abandoned and actualized everything to be realized, making their minds

entirely pure. By accomplishing their own aim — the truth body with the first three qualities — buddhas have the knowledge, compassionate love, and ability to manifest in form bodies in order to teach the Dharma to those who are suitable to be trained.

8. The excellent quality of *others' welfare* or purpose refers to a buddha's form bodies that benefit others in the most meaningful way. This quality subsumes the three qualities of knowledge, compassionate love, and power. With their omniscient knowledge, buddhas perfectly understand the dispositions, aspirations, and capabilities of each sentient being to be trained. With compassionate love, they seek to benefit others. With their power of wisdom and compassion, and without any hesitation or self-doubt, they teach paths that are appropriate for sentient beings with different inclinations. To those inclined toward the Śrāvaka Vehicle, buddhas teach the four truths. For those inclined toward the Solitary Realizer Vehicle, buddhas teach the twelve links — the forward and reverse sequences of the afflictive and purified sides. To those inclined toward the Bodhisattva Vehicle, they also teach great love, great compassion, and bodhicitta, as well as the way to actualize the pristine wisdom knowing things as they are and the pristine wisdom knowing the variety of phenomena.

The two purities of a buddha's mind — the first two qualities — are aspects of the nature truth body and are unconditioned. Other aspects of a buddha's mind are awarenesses that are aspects of the wisdom truth body and include conditioned phenomena.

Eight Excellent Qualities of the Dharma Jewel

The Dharma Jewel is a truth of the completely pure class (that is, the true cessations and true paths) in an ārya's continuum that possesses any of the eight excellent qualities, such as being inconceivable and so forth. True paths are consciousnesses informed by the wisdom directly realizing the subtle selflessness of persons and phenomena. They are first generated on the path of seeing, which marks a bodhisattva's transition from an ordinary being to an ārya.

Among an ārya's true paths are uninterrupted paths and liberated paths. An *uninterrupted path* is a wisdom directly realizing emptiness that is in the process of eliminating some portion of defilements. Those defilements do not exist in the mind at the time of the uninterrupted path, but they have not yet been completely abandoned. When they have

been completely and forever abandoned and their true cessation actualized, this wisdom directly realizing emptiness is known as a *liberated path*. Through each successive true path and its corresponding true cessation, bodhisattvas gradually abandon all afflictive and cognitive obscurations on the bodhisattva paths of seeing and meditation. Bodhisattvas become buddhas on the path of no-more-learning.

A true cessation is the purified aspect of the emptiness of a mind that has abandoned a certain portion of obscurations. True cessations have two factors: natural purity and the purity of adventitious defilements. *Natural purity* is the emptiness of inherent existence of all phenomena, here referring specifically to the emptiness of inherent existence of the mind. It is not an actual cessation because inherent existence has never existed and so cannot be ceased. The *purity of adventitious defilements* is the cessation of a portion of obscurations that is gained by cultivating the antidote, true paths. The Buddha Jewel fully possesses both purities. Other āryas possess natural purity and a portion of the purity of adventitious defilements. True cessations are genuine freedom; they are peaceful in that conceptual elaborations and dualistic appearances have been pacified.

The mere temporary absence of a defilement in the mind is not a true cessation. Even non-Buddhists can temporarily stop coarse manifest afflictions by attaining the first dhyāna, which suppresses but does not eliminate them. This is not a true cessation because these afflictions can again arise in their minds.

True paths free us from all duḥkha, its causes, and the latencies of its causes, and in that way they protect us. True cessations are the state of freedom. With the attainment of the liberated path of the path of seeing, ārya bodhisattvas have completely ceased all acquired afflictions. In addition, they no longer have any doubt regarding the Three Jewels as their objects of refuge and can never fall under the influence of misleading teachers. Having overcome wrong views, their conviction in the law of karma and its effects is unmoving. As their wisdom realizing emptiness becomes more powerful and they attain higher levels of the path, their innate obscurations are gradually eradicated, bringing great inner freedom. For this reason, true paths and true cessations are said to be the actual refuge that protect us from saṃsāra and personal nirvāṇa. The *Sublime Continuum* details the eight qualities (RGV 1.10):

> That which is inconceivable, without the two, without
> conception,

pure, clear, and of the antidotal class,

that which is free from attachment and frees from attachment —

that bearer of the character of the [last] two truths is the Dharma.

Let's look at each of the excellent qualities in turn.

1. The excellent quality of *being inconceivable* consists of three ways true cessations are inconceivable.

First, they cannot be conceived exactly as they are by logicians with respect to the four possibilities of existence, nonexistence, both, and neither. Logicians are those who use reasonings that create mistaken conceptual superimpositions regarding the way things exist. The ultimate truth — which is both true cessation and the Dharma Jewel — is not (a) truly existent, (b) truly nonexistent, (c) truly both existent and nonexistent, and (d) truly neither existent nor nonexistent.

Second, true cessations cannot be adequately known by relying on others' assertions and must be known experientially by oneself. Third, as ultimate truths, true cessations are not realized by a dualistic mind. They are known only by pristine wisdom that is free from duality.

2. The excellent quality of *being without the two* indicates that true cessations are free from a portion of the two: afflictions and polluted karma. This is the purity from adventitious defilements, which cannot be experientially understood through words and concepts. The Dharma Jewel is present on the paths of seeing, meditation, and no-more-learning and is free from some portion of afflictions and polluted karma.

3. The excellent quality of *being without conceptualization* means that the Dharma Jewel is free from all conceptualizations grasping true existence and free from distorted conceptions that give rise to afflictions. True cessations are known by our own wisdom in meditative equipoise on emptiness in which all dualistic appearances have vanished. This wisdom is called "individual self-knowledge" (T. *so so rang rig*).[7]

4. The excellent quality of *purity* means that the Dharma Jewel is not mixed with any obscurations. As wisdom paths of āryas, the Dharma Jewel is the pristine wisdom directly realizing emptiness. As such, it is free from all defilements that prevent the direct perception of ultimate reality.

5. The excellent quality of *clarity* indicates that the Dharma Jewel clearly knows the ultimate mode of existence — emptiness — of all

phenomena. It is free from the bias embedded in attachment, anger, and confusion.

6. The excellent quality of the *antidotal class* refers to true paths being able to counteract some portion of the afflicted obscurations or cognitive obscurations. They dispel the darkness of ignorance and its latencies from the minds of sentient beings.

7. The excellent quality of *true cessations* subsumes the first three excellent qualities and refers to the true cessations of all three vehicles. Free from all craving, they are ultimate truths.

8. The excellent quality of *true paths* acts to eradicate defilements and subsumes the second three excellent qualities. As consciousnesses, true paths are conventional truths. Like the sun that eliminates the darkness of ignorance, the true paths of all three vehicles function to free the mind from craving and other defilements.

A Dharma Jewel must have at least some of the eight qualities. It is not necessary to have all eight of them. For example, the uninterrupted path of the path of seeing is a true path but not a true cessation.

Eight Excellent Qualities of the Saṅgha Jewel

The Saṅgha Jewel consists of āryas from all three vehicles who possess any of the eight excellent qualities of knowledge and liberation. It is not necessary that this person possesses all eight qualities. For example, an ārya on the uninterrupted path of the path of seeing has the qualities of knowledge but not the qualities of liberation. Describing the qualities of the Mahāyāna Saṅgha Jewel, the *Sublime Continuum* says (RGV 1.14):

> Because of pure inner pristine wisdoms
>
> seeing the mode and varieties,
>
> the assembly of intelligent irreversible ones
>
> is endowed with unsurpassable excellent qualities.

The eight excellent qualities of the Saṅgha Jewel are:

1. The excellent quality of *knowing the mode of existence* — the emptiness of inherent existence of all phenomena. The Saṅgha Jewel has inner wisdom knowing that truly existent identities do not exist. The analytical minds that arise from learning, reflection, and meditation gradually come to ascertain the correct view of emptiness. The wisdoms

arising from learning and reflection are conceptual, and the wisdom arising from meditation may be either conceptual or nonconceptual. The perspective of probing awareness (T. *rigs shes*) that is conceptual (on the path of preparation) is very different from that of nonconceptual probing awareness (on the path of seeing and above), which has ascertained emptiness just as it is and realizes it directly. The former investigates and conceptually analyzes how things exist; it is an essential step in realizing emptiness, although its understanding is not complete or direct. The latter is completely free from dualistic appearances and is possessed only by the Saṅgha Jewel.

2. The excellent quality of *knowing the varieties* indicates that the Saṅgha Jewel knows some portion of the diversity of phenomena.

3. The excellent quality of *inner pristine wisdom* is āryas' wisdom that specifically knows the buddha essence (*tathāgatagarbha*). Āryas, who comprise the Saṅgha Jewel, have direct knowledge of the buddha nature as it exists in all sentient beings. This is unlike ordinary beings, who possess the buddha nature but do not know it directly. Inner pristine wisdom also refers to the above two knowledges.

4. The excellent quality of being *pure from the obscurations of attachment* is freedom from some portion of afflictive obscurations, especially freedom from the ignorance grasping true existence.

5. The excellent quality of being *pure from impeding obstructions* is freedom from some portions of the cognitive obscurations.

6. The excellent quality of *being pure of the inferior obscurations* is freedom from some portion of the self-centered wish to attain liberation for oneself alone. This refers to irreversible bodhisattvas on the pure grounds — the eighth, ninth, and tenth grounds — whose qualities are close to those of buddhas. They are "irreversible" in that they will never again take rebirth in saṃsāra under the control of afflictions and polluted karma and they have eradicated all self-centered thought that strives for only their own liberation. This is a powerful attainment, and such a person is bound directly for buddhahood and cannot reverse from this course. If bodhisattvas have not attained the signs of irreversibility by the eighth ground, they will attain them then.

"Inferior obscurations" may also refer to obscurations to meditative absorption (*snyoms 'jug gi sgrib pa*), certain obstructions that prevent the easy movement between different meditative absorptions and thus impede the gaining of realizations.

7. The excellent quality of *knowledge* (true paths) includes the first three excellent qualities. The true paths in the continuums of ārya bodhisattvas are free from grasping true existence, but the true paths of the eighth-, ninth-, and tenth-ground bodhisattvas are so pure that they are close to the unsurpassable wisdom of a Buddha. They are objects of refuge that are free from any taint of seeking liberation for themselves alone.

8. The excellent quality of *liberation* refers to true cessations and subsumes the second three excellent qualities.

Describing the knowledge of the Saṅgha Jewel, the *Sublime Continuum* says (RGV 1.15):

> By realizing the quiescent nature of beings,
>
> they perceive the very mode [of existence of phenomena].
>
> This is due to the natural, thorough purity
>
> and because afflictions are extinguished from the start.

"Realizing the quiescent nature of beings" refers to understanding the selflessness of persons and of phenomena. The wisdom directly realizing emptiness perceives the two selflessnesses — the ultimate nature of all persons and of all phenomena other than persons. This true path realizes these two emptinesses without differentiation; it simultaneously and directly perceives the emptiness of all existents. Such realization is possible because the nature of the mind is clear light — it is empty of true existence. This is its natural purity. In addition, the afflictions are not embedded in the nature of the mind, and in this respect they are primordially extinguished.

Enumerating the excellent qualities of the Three Jewels demonstrates why they are trustworthy and complete sources of refuge. Since we have the fortune to encounter such reliable objects of refuge, it is important that we take refuge in them fully, from the depth of our hearts, and to take refuge repeatedly in order to deepen and strengthen our connection with them. Doing this will enable us to call on their guidance no matter what situations we face in life or when we are dying.

The Perfection and Tantric Vehicles also include śrāvaka āryas and arhats as the Saṅgha Jewel. The *Sublime Continuum* explicitly mentions only ārya bodhisattvas and buddhas as the Saṅgha Jewel, because this text emphasizes buddha nature and one final vehicle — that is, everyone will eventually enter the Bodhisattva Vehicle and become a buddha.

Bodhisattvas respect the śrāvaka Saṅgha, as they are fellow practitioners who follow the Buddha and attain liberation. However, there are some differences between the two. Bodhisattvas are motivated by bodhicitta and aim to become buddhas. By fulfilling the collections of merit and wisdom, they attain buddhahood where all obscurations have been abandoned and all realizations and excellent qualities brought to fulfillment. Śrāvakas are motivated to attain personal nirvāṇa and aim to become arhats who have eradicated afflictive obscurations, but not cognitive obscurations. Ārya bodhisattvas are endowed with both wisdom and the great compassion that wants all sentient beings to be free from the duḥkha of saṃsāra, and they are committed to bringing that about. They dispel the ignorance of countless sentient beings by their altruistic deeds that lead others on the path.

Final and Provisional Refuges

The *Sublime Continuum* speaks of the objects of refuge or just refuges (T. *skyabs gnas*, *skyabs yul*), which are sometimes used in different contexts than the Three Jewels (T. *dkon mchog gsum*). Clarifying in our mind the differences and similarities between the Three Jewels and the three objects of refuge can be challenging because there are many permutations that can be made between them. And when we add in the symbolic jewels — the objects or people that represent the Three Jewels — there are even more! Exerting effort to understand these helps us to understand the Three Jewels and the three objects of refuge more deeply and to avoid confusing them with the symbolic jewels. Although charts are provided below to summarize the descriptions of each, thinking about the explanations of the classifications is what brings understanding.

The *Sublime Continuum* teaches the final and provisional objects of refuge to direct all sentient beings to the ultimate or final refuge. Those who are definite in the śrāvaka lineage regard arhatship as their final goal; they don't seek buddhahood or believe it is necessary to attain it. The division into final and provisional objects of refuge is made to guide and encourage them to seek the final goal. This emphasizes that there is one final vehicle and that all beings will eventually enter the Mahāyāna and attain buddhahood.

The three objects of refuge are spoken of as final (ultimate) and provisional (conventional) refuges. A *final object of refuge* is a refuge that has completely traversed the path, and a *provisional object of refuge* is a refuge that has not completely traversed the path. The final refuge is the

final destination we aim to attain by following the path, whereas the provisional refuge helps us to arrive there.

In this light, the final refuge is a buddha having the four buddha bodies. To review, these are: (1) the nature truth body — the emptiness and true cessation in the mindstream of a buddha, (2) the wisdom truth body — the Buddha's omniscient mind, (3) the enjoyment body — the form a buddha appears in to guide ārya bodhisattvas in the pure lands, and (4) the emanation bodies — the forms a buddha appears in that we ordinary beings can perceive and relate to. The nature truth body and the wisdom truth body together are called "the truth body of a buddha." The enjoyment body and emanation bodies together are called "the form body of a buddha." A buddha with these four bodies is our final refuge, the final destination that we want to actualize on the path; there is nothing higher than this. So a buddha is both the actual Buddha Jewel as well as a final refuge, whereas an image of a buddha is not an actual Buddha Jewel, a final refuge, or even a conventional refuge; it is a symbolic Buddha Jewel (T. *brdar btags pa'i sangs rgyas dkon mchog*).

The realized Dharma has two aspects: true paths and true cessations. These exist only in the mindstreams of āryas who have realized emptiness directly. New bodhisattvas as well as śrāvakas and solitary realizers on the paths of accumulation and preparation of their respective vehicles have not realized emptiness directly and are not āryas. The true paths in the mindstreams of ārya learners (āryas who are not buddhas) are not final objects of refuge; they are a provisional refuge. This is because the pristine wisdom in the mindstreams of ārya learners still has a deceptive nature (T. *slu wa*) in the sense that it appears to them to be completely free of defilements, although it is not.[8] This pristine wisdom directly realizing emptiness is currently free from the influence of pollutants of ignorance and its seeds because only emptiness appears to this mind and the dualistic appearances of true existence, veiled truths, and subject and object have vanished. However, this pristine wisdom is not *completely* free from the pollutants of the latencies of ignorance and still possesses defilement. There is a difference between the pristine wisdom being free of the influence of the pollutants of ignorance and its latencies, and the person being free of them. Here the pristine wisdom is free from the influence of the pollutants of ignorance and its latencies, but the person is not. After ārya learners' meditative equipoise on emptiness, in post-meditation time the appearance of true existence arises in their minds again. For this reason, ārya learners' pristine wisdom is not *completely* free from pollutants of ignorance and its latencies. It is in this sense that the

true paths of ārya learners are said to be deceptive and are therefore a provisional refuge. However, the true cessations and true paths in the mindstreams of ārya buddhas are a final refuge.

Similarly, the true cessations in the mindstreams of bodhisattva āryas and śrāvaka and solitary realizer āryas (including arhats) are not the final refuge. This is because these āryas still have cognitive obscurations, even though their true cessations are the pacification of their true duḥkha and true origins. However, since buddhas are completely free from both afflictive obscurations and cognitive obscurations, the true paths and true cessations in their mindstreams are the final refuge.

The transmitted or scriptural Dharma that is made of letters, words, phrases, and sentences explains how to actualize the realized Dharma in our mindstreams. With the exception of the transmitted Dharma in the mindstream of a buddha, the rest of the transmitted Dharma is not a final or conventional refuge, nor is it an actual Dharma Jewel. It is a symbolic Dharma Jewel (T. *brdar btags pa'i chos dkon mchog*). The meaning of the subject matter of the scriptures in learners' mindstreams is like a raft that takes them across the ocean of saṃsāra. Once they are on the other side and have attained awakening, the raft is no longer necessary and can be left behind. However, just because the transmitted Dharma Jewel in the mindstreams of learners is not the final refuge, that doesn't mean that the Buddha's word is no longer necessary or important at buddhahood. To the contrary, this is how the Buddha teaches sentient beings and guides us to liberation and awakening. The transmitted Dharma in the continuum of a buddha isn't to be left behind.

Speaking of the final and provisional objects of refuge, the *Sublime Continuum* says (RGV 1.20):

> Because it will be abandoned, because it bears the quality of being deceptive,
>
> because of absence and because it is together with fear,
>
> the two types of Dharma and the assembly of āryas
>
> are not supreme, everlasting refuges.

"Because it will be abandoned" refers to the twelve branches of scriptures within the continuums of learners. As mentioned above, the teachings are like a raft that takes us to the other shore where we will be free from cyclic existence. After crossing, we no longer need the raft, and for this reason the teachings are not final, ultimate, or everlasting refuge. "Because it bears the quality of being deceptive" explains that the true path directly

realizing emptiness in the mindstreams of ārya learners is not a final refuge because those āryas are not yet free of all obscurations. These true paths must go beyond being together with a mindstream with defilements and be in the continuum of a buddha in order to be considered nondeceptive.

"Because of absence" describes why nirvāṇa without remainder (the nirvāṇa of an arhat who has passed away from his polluted body) is a refuge, but not a final refuge: it is the absence of duḥkha and its origins, but not an absence of both obscurations. "Together with fear" indicates that all ārya learners — even the tenth-ground bodhisattvas who are so amazing — are not final refuges because they still have a fear of the cognitive obscurations. Thus all the ārya learners are a provisional refuge, not a final refuge, but they are included in the Saṅgha Jewel. An ārya buddha is a final refuge as well as a Saṅgha Jewel. The assembly of ordinary Saṅgha members is not a final or a conventional refuge, nor is it the actual Saṅgha Jewel; they are a symbolic Saṅgha Jewel (T. *brdar btags pa'i dge 'dun dkon mchog*).

Speaking of the Three Jewels and of the final and provisional refuges in such detail emphasizes the unique qualities of the buddhas — the total purity and clarity of their minds, the full abandonments and realizations possessed only by the fully awakened ones. Seeing this, our faith in the Buddha increases as does our determination to become a buddha ourselves.

The chart below clarifies the final and provisional objects of refuge for the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha. When we compare the ultimate and conventional refuges to the definitions of the Three Jewels, we see that the Dharma Jewel in the continuum of a buddha is the final refuge, whereas the Dharma Jewel in the continuums of ārya learners of all vehicles is the provisional refuge. All these true paths and true cessations in the continuums of both ārya learners as well as buddhas are the actual Dharma Jewel that possess any of the eight excellent qualities, such as being inconceivable and so forth, but not all of them qualify as the final refuge.

The Saṅgha Jewel includes the buddhas, arhats, and ārya learners of all three vehicles. Among these, only the buddhas qualify as a final refuge, not any the others. The ārya learners, as beings who possess any of the eight excellent qualities of knowledge and liberation, are included in the Saṅgha Jewel, but they are conventional objects of refuge. Although ordinary monastics and a monastic community composed of ordinary

beings are called "Saṅgha," they are symbolic of Saṅgha Jewel and are not the final or provisional refuge.

The Final and Provisional Objects of Refuge and Symbolic Jewels

	BUDDHA	DHARMA	SAṄGHA
Final object of refuge	The four buddha bodies: nature and wisdom truth bodies and enjoyment and emanation form bodies	True cessations and true paths (realized Dharma) in the mindstreams of ārya buddhas are a final refuge.	Ārya buddhas
Provisional object of refuge		True paths and true cessations (realized Dharma) in the mindstreams of ārya learners; nirvāṇa without remainder	Ārya learners
Symbolic jewel	Images of the Buddha	Transmitted Dharma except the transmitted Dharma in a buddha's mindstream	The assembly of ordinary Saṅgha members

The chart below reviews the ultimate and conventional refuges.

The Final and Provisional Refuges

THREE JEWELS	FINAL REFUGE OBJECTS	PROVISIONAL REFUGE OBJECTS
Buddha Jewel	Truth bodies, Form bodies	
Dharma Jewel	Realized Dharma (true paths and true cessations) in the continuum of a buddha	Realized Dharma (true paths and true cessations) in the continuums of the ārya learners of any vehicle
Saṅgha Jewel	Buddhas	An ārya learner of any vehicle

The next chart combines the discussions of the Three Jewels and the objects of refuge.[9]

Three Jewels, Actual and Symbolic Jewels, and Final and Provisional Refuges[10]

JEWELS OR BEARERS OF THE NAME OF JEWEL	ACTUAL JEWEL	SYMBOLIC JEWEL	FINAL OBJECT OF REFUGE	PROVISIONAL OBJECT OF REFUGE
Buddha Jewel (two truth bodies and two form bodies)	Yes		Yes	
Buddha images		Yes		
Dharma Jewel (realized Dharma of true cessations and true paths)	Yes		Yes: those in the continuums of ārya buddhas	Yes: those in the continuums of ārya learners
Transmitted or scriptural Dharma		Yes		
Saṅgha Jewel (ārya beings)	Yes		Yes: an ārya buddha	Yes: an ārya learner
Ordinary Saṅgha members		Yes		

As noted, it's important to take refuge in the Three Jewels every day. If you have a regular daily meditation practice, do this at the beginning of your meditation session. Visualize Śākyamuni Buddha, his body made of golden light, in the space in front of you. He is surrounded by your spiritual mentors, teachers of the lineage, buddhas, meditational deities, bodhisattvas, arhats, śrāvaka and solitary-realizer āryas, ḍākas and ḍākinīs, and transcendental Dharma protectors. Visualize all sentient beings surrounding you, with everyone facing the merit field. To overcome antipathy toward people you don't get along with or feel unsafe around, visualize them in front of you, between you and the Buddha. Feeling that you are in the presence of holy beings who are looking at you with complete acceptance and great compassion, take refuge. A verse that is commonly recited is:

> I take refuge until I am awakened in the Buddhas, the Dharma, and the Saṅgha.
>
> By the merit I create by generosity and the other perfections, may I attain buddhahood in order to benefit all sentient beings.

In Chinese Buddhism, a refuge verse that is often chanted to dedicate the merit at the conclusion of a meditation session is:

> I take refuge in the Buddha; may each and every sentient being understand the Great Way [Mahāyāna] profoundly and

bring forth the bodhi mind.

I take refuge in the Dharma; may each and every sentient being deeply enter the sūtra treasury and have wisdom vast as the sea.

I take refuge in the Saṅgha; may each and every sentient being form together a great assembly, one and all in harmony.

The Three Jewels according to the Vajra Vehicle

The actual meaning of "refuge" is found in highest yoga tantra with its description of how to actualize the four bodies of a buddha. This class of tantra speaks of the fundamental innate mind of clear light, the subtlest consciousness of each and every sentient being. This innate clear light mind is beginningless and endless. It came from our past lives to the present life and will continue on to buddhahood. Our coarse consciousnesses — the five sensory consciousnesses and our coarse mental consciousness beset by its profusion of thoughts — do not continue to awakening.[11]

When the fundamental innate mind of clear light is purified of all obscurations, it becomes the wisdom dharmakāya, and its emptiness and true cessations are the nature dharmakāya. The medium through which the wisdom dharmakāya appears to sentient beings in order to benefit them is the enjoyment body that benefits āryas in the pure land. From the enjoyment body arise the emanation bodies that interact with ordinary sentient beings.

The substantial cause for these four bodies of a buddha exists in us now — it is the fundamental innate mind of clear light and the subtlest wind that accompanies it, which by nature are empty of inherent existence. Thus the potential for full awakening exists in us now. The Sūtrayāna explanation of the substantial causes and conditions of the truth bodies and the form bodies is incomplete; it does not fully explain how the two collections of merit and wisdom become the causes for the body and mind of a buddha. Highest yoga tantra, on the other hand, contains the full explanation of this process. However, we cannot jump to the practice of highest yoga tantra immediately; we must create a firm foundation by practicing the Sūtrayāna.

In Vajrayāna, the Buddha Jewel includes all buddhas throughout the universe and all the awakened meditational deities, such as

Avalokiteśvara, Mañjuśrī, Vajrapāṇi, Yamāntaka, Cakrasaṃvara, and Guhyasamāja. The Dharma Jewel includes the true cessations and true paths in the mindstreams of all āryas. Here the emphasis is on the true path being the fundamental innate clear light mind that has been transformed into the union of bliss and emptiness at that stage of actual clear light. The Saṅgha Jewel includes ārya bodhisattvas, supramundane heroes (*ḍākas*) and heroines (*ḍākinīs*), supramundane Dharma protectors such as Palden Lhamo, as well as ārya śrāvakas. Supramundane ḍākas and ḍākinīs are highly realized practitioners on the tantric path who assist practitioners by overcoming obstacles and gathering necessary conditions for their practice. Supramundane Dharma protectors are ārya bodhisattvas who appear in fierce forms in order to protect the Dharma. Worldly Dharma protectors are not included in the Three Jewels because they are saṃsāric beings.

Tantric practitioners also take refuge in the guru. It is important to understand this properly in order to avoid confusion. The guru is not a fourth object of refuge; rather, the ultimate guru is the four buddha bodies, with the emphasis being on the omniscient mind of bliss and emptiness. The ultimate guru encapsulates all three refuges. The ultimate guru's body is the Saṅgha, speech is the Dharma, and mind is the Buddhas. The ultimate guru is not a human being, but the omniscient minds of all buddhas; it is the union of bliss and emptiness that, motivated by great compassion, is able to effortlessly and spontaneously manifest in a variety of forms to benefit sentient beings who are receptive to their influence. The ultimate guru is our actual object of refuge.

Conventional gurus are the spiritual masters who bestow tantric initiations, teachings, and instructions. We view them as embodiments of the ultimate guru, which helps make our refuge objects appear more immediate and accessible. Our Dharma practice becomes more alive when we feel that we are near the buddhas. The tantras instruct us to see our conventional gurus as buddhas, just as we practice seeing our environment as the deity's maṇḍala and the sentient beings around us as deities.

Some practitioners make the mistake of confusing refuge in the guru with refuge in the personalities of our beloved tantric spiritual masters who are human beings. In this case, when the conventional guru passes away, these disciples feel bereft of refuge, and over time many of them may drift away from the Dharma. This is sad because their ultimate object of refuge, the ultimate guru, is always present, but they don't recognize this. Their feelings of loss can be alleviated by continually bringing their

attention back to the ultimate guru and imagining the ultimate guru manifesting as the central figure in their daily practice of guru yoga.

In tantric practice, we take refuge at the beginning of each meditation session. To do this, we visualize in the space in front of us the Buddhas, Dharma, and Saṅgha surrounding the principal deity whose practice we will do. Seeing all of them as the manifestations of the ultimate guru — the omniscient minds of all the buddhas — we take refuge.[12]

Below are the refuge verses from some tantric practices. The Heruka Cakrasaṃvara practice begins:

> At all times I take refuge in the Buddhas, Dharma, and Saṅgha of all three vehicles, in the ḍākinīs of secret mantra yoga, in the heroes, heroines, and powerful goddesses,[13] in the great beings (mahāsattvas), in bodhisattvas, and above all, at all times, I take refuge in my spiritual master.

In the Guhyasamāja practice the refuge verse is:

> I take refuge continually in the sugata buddhas in whose minds abides a mental play [realization of emptiness] actualized in stages like the waxing of the stainless moon and infinite methods of pure compassion. I go for refuge continually to the holy Dharma, which, as the truth of the path, is the basis for total freedom from all misconceptions and the foundation for the excellence of the holy beings [buddhas, meditational deities, and āryas], and which, as the truth of cessation, is the very nature of emptiness, the single taste of all phenomena. I go for refuge to the host of āryas who are masters of discipline, abide on the bodhisattva stages such as the Joyous One, are endowed with the glory of bodhicitta, are incited by supreme compassion, and have become purely freed from the fetters abandoned on each stage as they progress.

2 | Qualities of the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha

In the previous chapter, we learned how the Fundamental Vehicle, Perfection Vehicle, and Vajra Vehicle describe the Three Jewels. In this chapter, we will discuss their excellent qualities — the attributes possessed only by trustworthy and fully qualified objects of refuge. The scriptures describe many groups of qualities of the Buddha, including four kinds of self-confidence, ten powers, eighteen unique qualities, and the qualities of the Buddha's body, speech, and mind. The Indian sages Dignāga and Dharmakīrti composed a logical argument that verifies the Buddha as a reliable spiritual guide. Although it is short, its meaning is deep.

We will then move into the Recollections of the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha, a practice found in the early sūtras and in both the Pāli and Sanskrit traditions. Although it may be seen as a practice to attain serenity, it also has the result of connecting to the Three Jewels in a profound way that we can rely on in times of duress and difficulty.

From there, we will examine the distinguishing features of each jewel and the causal and resultant refuges.

The Four Kinds of Self-Confidence

In his autocommentary to the *Supplement* (*Madhyamakāvatārabhāṣya*, 6.210cd), Candrakīrti quotes a passage describing the four kinds of self-confidence (four fearlessnesses) of the Tathāgata. Gyaltsab explains these in his commentary to Maitreya's *Sublime Continuum*. This passage is also present in *The Greater Discourse on the Lion's Roar* (*Mahāsīhanāda Sutta*, MN 12.22–26) in the Pāli canon.

> Sāriputta, the Tathāgata has these four kinds of self-confidence, possessing which he claims the herd-leader's place, roars his lion's roar in the assemblies, and sets rolling the Wheel of Brahmā.[14] What are the four?
>
> (1) Here, I see no ground on which any renunciate, brahmin, god, Māra, Brahmā or anyone else at all in the world could, in accordance with the Dhamma, accuse me thus: "While you claim full awakening, you are not fully awakened

> in regard to certain things." Seeing no ground for that, I abide in safety, fearlessness, and self-confidence.
>
> (2) I see no ground on which any renunciate … or anyone at all could accuse me thus: "While you claim to have destroyed the pollutants, these pollutants are not destroyed by you." Seeing no ground for that, I abide in safety, fearlessness, and self-confidence.
>
> (3) I see no ground on which any renunciate … or anyone at all could accuse me thus: "Those things you called obstructions are not able to obstruct one who engages in them." Seeing no ground for that, I abide in safety, fearlessness, and self-confidence.
>
> (4) I see no ground on which any renunciate … or anyone at all could accuse me thus: "When you teach the Dhamma to someone, it does not lead him when he practices it to the complete destruction of duḥkha." Seeing no ground for that, I abide in safety, fearlessness, and self-confidence.

Being fearless in these four ways, the Tathāgata teaches the Dharma with perfect intrepidity and self-confidence, free from all self-doubt. First, no one can justifiably say that the Buddha knows some things but not everything. With full confidence, the Buddha is able to state that he has complete and perfect knowledge of all phenomena. This quality is attained through being generous in teaching the Dharma.

Second, no one can rightly say that while the Buddha claims to have destroyed all pollutants, he in fact has not. By means of his perfect realization of reality, he has cleansed his mind of all gross and subtle pollutants, as well as their potencies, enabling his mind to accurately reflect all that exists. This quality ensures that the Buddha's motivation for speaking, acting, and teaching is free from greed, competition, conceit, and jealousy. This quality is attained through having abandoned conceit and arrogance.

Third, no one can with good reason say that what the Buddha states is an obstruction to awakening is not one. As related in a Pāli sūtra (MN 22), Bhikkhu Ariṭṭha believed that activities the Buddha said are obstructions — such as hedonistically indulging in sensual pleasures — do not obstruct someone who engages in them. With this mistaken thought, he encouraged people to indulge in these activities to be happy. Other monks and then the Buddha himself admonished Ariṭṭha, saying that the Buddha has repeatedly explained why sensual desire is an obstruction and that this can be verified by observing one's own experience. The Sanskrit tradition

explains this fearlessness as the Buddha's confidence in saying that the afflictive obscurations prevent liberation and the cognitive obscurations obstruct full awakening. This quality of fearlessness comes about through not having followed wrong doctrines in the past.

Fourth, no one can correctly state that the path the Tathāgata teaches does not lead to liberation and the total elimination of duḥkha. Many of the Buddha's disciples during his life and afterward have followed the path the Buddha taught and attained its results: liberation and awakening.

The *Ornament of Clear Realizations* explains that of these four proclamations, two are related to one's own welfare (in this case, the Buddha's welfare) and two to others' welfare. Stating with complete self-confidence that he is fully awakened regarding all phenomena and that he has destroyed all pollutants is related to fulfilling his own welfare because these are results that the Buddha himself experiences. His fearless proclamations that he correctly identifies obstructions on the path and that the Dharma he teaches definitely leads to nirvāṇa when practiced correctly are qualities by which the Buddha benefits others and thus are known as fulfilling others' welfare.

The Ten Powers of the Tathāgata

The ten powers (*daśa bala*, *dasa bala*) are exceptional knowledges unique to the Buddha that enable him to perform the special functions of a buddha, such as to "roar his lion's roar" of full awakening and to establish the Buddha's teaching in the world, teach sentient beings skillfully, and lead them to awakening. These ten are pristine wisdoms that have abandoned all obscurations and know the infinite knowable objects. The ten are found in the Sanskrit *Sūtra on the Ten Grounds* (*Daśabhūmika Sūtra*) and are explained in the *Sublime Continuum*. They are also found in the Pāli sūtra *The Greater Discourse on the Lion's Roar* (*Mahāsīhanāda Sutta*, MN 12) and are explained in the Pāli Abhidharma *Book of Analysis* (*Vibhaṅga*). The numbered extracts below are from the Pāli sūtra. In general, unless otherwise noted, the explanations accord with both the Sanskrit and Pāli traditions.

> (1) The Tathāgata understands as it actually is the possible as possible and the impossible as impossible.

The Buddha knows with direct, unmistaken perception the appropriate and inappropriate relations between actions and their results. For example, he knows that happiness arises only from constructive actions, never from destructive ones, and that harmful actions lead to duḥkha, never happiness.

This quality is a result of the Buddha's having generated bodhicitta and purely kept the bodhisattva ethical code in his previous lives.

The *Book of Analysis* in the Pāli canon gives more examples of what the Buddha knows through this power, such as: It is impossible for someone with right view to consider the conditioned phenomena of saṃsāra as permanent, pleasurable, and self, although it is possible for someone who lacks right view to consider them in this way. It is impossible for someone with definite right view — an ārya — to commit any of the five heinous actions of killing one's mother, father, an arhat, causing the Tathāgata to bleed, or causing a schism in the Saṅgha. However, it is possible for someone without right view to do these actions. It is impossible for an ārya to relinquish his or her refuge in the Buddha and follow a non-Buddhist teacher. Although disciples can understand these depending on guidance given by the Buddha, it is the Buddha who discovered these truths and knows them directly. Because he understands these natural laws, he is the perfectly Awakened One.

> (2) The Tathāgata understands as it actually is the results of actions undertaken, past, future, and present, with possibilities and with causes.

Only the Buddha fully and accurately knows the intricacies of karma and its results. Having penetrated the law of karma and its effects with wisdom, he knows that each sentient being must experience the results of their actions. The Buddha understands the various types of karma — virtuous, nonvirtuous, neutral, propelling, completing, polluted, unpolluted, and so forth — and sees each and every coarse and subtle cause leading to a particular event in the beginningless lives of each sentient being.

> (3) The Tathāgata understands as it actually is the ways leading to all destinations (*gati*).

"Destination" refers to the various types of rebirth sentient beings may take — as hell beings, hungry ghosts, animals, human beings, and devas[15] — and to the destination of nirvāṇa for the liberated ones. The Buddha also knows the paths leading to each type of rebirth — some are polluted virtuous paths that lead to fortunate rebirths; others are nonvirtuous and ripen in rebirth in unfortunate realms. Having cultivated the practices and paths of the three vehicles — śrāvaka, solitary realizer, and bodhisattva — the Buddha knows the correct paths leading to nirvāṇa and full awakening and can identify the incorrect paths that lead to continued rebirth in saṃsāra.

> (4) The Tathāgata understands as it actually is the world with its many and different elements (*dhātu*).

In the *Sutta of the Many Kinds of Elements* (*Bahudhātuka Sutta*, MN 115), the Buddha demonstrates his knowledge of the eighteen constituents (*dhātu*), the six elements (*dhātu*) — earth, water, fire, air, space, and consciousness — the external and internal sense sources, the twenty-two faculties (*indriya*),[16] the twelve links of dependent origination, and so on. The Buddha does not accept the superficial appearance of things as monolithic wholes, but with wisdom discerns them as impermanent, conditioned, and dependent processes. With knowledge of all these elements, the Buddha is able to teach in accordance with the faculties and abilities of the sentient beings he is addressing.

> (5) The Tathāgata understands as it actually is how beings have different inclinations (*adhimokṣa*, *adhimokkha*).

Sentient beings have various inferior and superior inclinations and interests. Inferior inclinations and interests involve aspirations for this life; superior inclinations and interests direct us toward liberation and awakening. Some are virtuous; others are nonvirtuous or neutral. Knowing others' minds with their diverse tendencies, the Buddha spoke to farmers, outcasts, merchants, and nobility, making the Dharma relevant to each person according to his or her way of thinking. The sūtras relate accounts of hostile brahmins or argumentative renunciates meeting the Buddha, who quickly allayed their antipathy and explained the Dharma to them in a way they could understand and accept. Many of these people then become the Buddha's followers.

The Sanskrit tradition adds that the Buddha also knows the inclinations of sentient beings that attract them to the three vehicles. By comprehending these, he is able to guide sentient beings accordingly, teaching whatever is suitable to each individual at a particular time so he or she will develop spiritually. This power is also called the "power that knows the paths that proceed everywhere," because it knows what is needed to attain upper rebirth and the goals of the three vehicles.

> (6) The Tathāgata understands as it actually is the disposition of the faculties of other beings.

The Buddha can look deep within each person's mind and know the strength of their faculties of faith, effort, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom. For people whose faculty of faith is more prominent, the Buddha leads them through devotional means to accomplish the path. Other people are more energetic and enterprising, some people are very mindful,

and others are naturally calm because their faculty of concentration is strong. Those with a more developed faculty of wisdom enjoy questioning and investigating. The Buddha teaches each type of person accordingly. In the end, all of us need to balance the five faculties, and when we are ripe to do that, the Buddha will show us the way.

> (7) The Tathāgata understands as it actually is the defilement, cleansing, and emergence in regard to the meditative stabilizations, liberations, concentrations, and meditative absorptions.

In this context, *defilement* (*saṃkleśa*, *saṃkilesa*) refers to those impediments that hinder a meditator from entering any of the meditative absorptions or, once having entered, make them deteriorate. *Cleansing* (*vyavadāna*, *vodāna*) is the method for removing that impediment. *Emergence* (P. *vuṭṭhāna*) is the way to come out of a state of meditative absorption after having entered it.

The eight liberations (*vimokṣa*, *vimokkha*) are states of meditative absorption. The nine serial absorptions (*samāpatti*) are the four dhyānas, the four formless absorptions, and the cessation of discrimination and feeling.[17] Because the Buddha has mastered all of these meditative attainments himself, he can guide others who seek them or who have attained them. He teaches the way to actualize these meditative attainments, and he urges practitioners who have the tendency to become attached to the bliss of concentration to continue practicing the path of compassion and wisdom.

In the Sanskrit tradition, this power is the Tathāgata's power that knows the thoroughly afflicted — attachment to the meditative absorptions and liberations — and the completely pure — the freedom from this attachment.

> (8) The Tathāgata recollects his manifold past lives — that is, one birth, two births, three births, four births, five births, ten births, twenty births, thirty births, forty births, fifty births, a hundred births, a thousand births, a hundred thousand births, many eons of world-contraction, many eons of world-expansion, many eons of world-contraction and expansion: "There I was so named, of such a clan, with such an appearance, such was my nutriment, such my experience of pleasure and pain, such my lifespan; and passing away from there, I reappeared elsewhere; and there too I was so named, of such a clan, with such an appearance, such was my nutriments, such my experience of pleasure and pain, such my

> lifespan; and passing away from there, I reappeared here." Thus with their aspects and particulars he recollects his manifold past lives.

This and the next power are the last two of the five superknowledges and the first two of the three higher knowledges that the Buddha gained while meditating during the night prior to his awakening. Recollecting his own previous rebirths, he understands what types of relationships he had with various sentient beings in the past and consequently how he could benefit them in this life. The Sanskrit tradition adds that the Buddha knows the previous lives of all other beings as well.

> (9) With the divine eye, which is purified and surpasses the human, the Tathāgata sees beings passing away and reappearing, inferior and superior, fair and ugly, fortunate and unfortunate. He understands how beings pass on according to their actions thus: "These worthy beings who were ill-conducted in body, speech, and mind, revilers of ariyas, wrong in their views, giving effect to wrong view in their actions — on the dissolution of the body, after death, have reappeared in a state of deprivation, in a bad destination, in perdition, even in hell. But these worthy beings who were well-conducted in body, speech, and mind, not revilers of ariyas, right in their views, giving effect to right view in their actions — on the dissolution of the body, after death, have reappeared in a good destination, even in the heavenly world."

The Buddha knows how beings die and are reborn according to their karma. Knowing this, he can manifest in whatever way is most beneficial to guide each being on the path to awakening. While with the previous power he knows past lives, with this power he knows present and future ones.

> (10) By realizing for himself with direct knowledge, the Tathāgata here and now enters upon and abides in the liberation of mind and liberation by wisdom (*cittavimukti-prajñāvimukti*, *cetovimutti-paññāvimutti*) that are unpolluted with the destruction of the pollutants.

This power knows that while śrāvaka and solitary-realizer arhats have eliminated only the afflictive obscurations, a tathāgata has eliminated all obscurations. Someone with the superknowledges can know the spiritual level only of those who are at the same or inferior level as himself. Only the fully awakened Buddha can know the levels of realization and attainment of each and every sentient being. He isn't fooled by our efforts to impress him and knows our strengths and weaknesses and who has attained the

awakening of which one of the three vehicles. Thus he can guide us on the path accordingly.

Maitreya speaks of the ten powers in chapter 6 of the *Sublime Continuum*, where their order is slightly different (RGV 193):

> (1) Knowing what is worthwhile and worthless,
>
> (2) knowing the ripening product of all action,
>
> (6) knowing faculties, (4) temperaments, and (5) aspirations,
>
> (3) knowing the path reaching the entire range,
>
> (7) knowing meditative stability and so on —
>
> when it is afflicted or without pollution —
>
> (8) memory of past states, (9) divine sight, and (10) peace
>
> are the ten aspects of the power of knowledge.

The Eighteen Unique Qualities of a Buddha

Both the Sanskrit and Pāli traditions describe eighteen distinctive qualities of a buddha (*aṣṭādaś-āveṇika-buddhadharma*, *aṭṭhāras-āveṇika-buddhadhammā*) that are not shared by arhats. The *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* says:[18]

> Subhūti, between the time when the Tathāgata manifestly and completely awakens to the highest, perfect, and complete awakening and the time when he will pass beyond sorrow, not having appropriation (the five polluted aggregates), the Tathāgata has no (1) mistakes, (2) chatter, (3) forgetfulness [lack of mindfulness], or (4) unequipoised mind. Likewise, he has no (5) recognition of difference [discordance], (6) indifference of not investigating individually, (7) loss of aspiration, (8) loss of joyous effort, (9) loss of mindfulness, (10) loss of concentration, (11) loss of wisdom, or (12) loss of complete liberation. (13) His pristine wisdom precedes and follows through all actions of the body. (14) His pristine wisdom precedes and follows through all actions of the speech. (15) His pristine wisdom precedes and follows through all actions of the mind. His unimpeded, unobstructed pristine wisdom vision penetrates into the (16) past, (17) future, and (18) present.

These eighteen distinctive features are consciousnesses. The *Questions of King Dhāraṇiśvara Sūtra* (*Dhāraṇiśvara-raja-paripṛccha-sūtra*) explains each quality, and the *Ornament* divides them into four groups: six unshared behaviors, six unshared realizations, three unshared awakening activities, and three unshared pristine wisdoms. These eighteen features are also found in the Pāli tradition's commentarial texts and are mentioned in Dhammapāla's *Treatise on the Pāramīs*.

Six Unshared Behaviors

1. Due to his mindfulness and conscientiousness, the Buddha has *no mistaken physical actions*, whether he is walking, standing, sitting, or lying down. His feet do not touch the ground when he walks, and any insect that touches them will be reborn in a pure land. He acts in accordance with what he says, and his speech fulfills the needs of each sentient being in that moment.

2. Always speaking appropriately, truthfully, and kindly, he is *free from mistaken speech* and chatter. The Buddha does not dispute with the world, nor does he complain or criticize what others have done.

3. He is *free from any lack of mindfulness* regarding the dhyānas and wisdom. *Without forgetting* sentient beings, he teaches them appropriately.

4. His mind *continuously abides in meditative equipoise* on emptiness and simultaneously teaches the Dharma to sentient beings.

5. He *does not perceive any discordant appearances* of inherent existence and recognizes all phenomena as sharing the one taste of emptiness. The Buddha is not biased toward sentient beings and does not benefit those who praise him and behave well or harm those who do not.

6. He abides in *perfect equanimity free from indifference*, knowing the individual characteristics of each phenomenon as well as when sentient beings' minds are ready to be ripened.

Six Unshared Realizations

7. With all-encompassing love and compassion, a buddha never experiences any decline of his *aspiration* and intention to benefit all sentient beings or to increase their virtuous qualities.

8. His *joyous effort* to lead others to awakening never diminishes. A buddha experiences no physical, verbal, or mental fatigue, and

continuously cares for the welfare of sentient beings without laziness or despondency.

9. A Buddha's *mindfulness* is effortless and uninterrupted. He is mindful of the situations each sentient being encounters in the past, present, and future and the methods to subdue their minds.

10. Free from all obscurations, he continuously remains in *samādhi* with pure and stainless wisdom focused on the ultimate reality of emptiness.

11. His *wisdom* knows that his state of awakening, which is free from both afflictive and cognitive obscurations, cannot degenerate. He lacks any dualistic appearance or grasping at duality and knows the clear light nature of the mind.

12. With *total freedom*, his inexhaustible wisdom perfectly knows all existents, the 84,000 Dharma teachings, the doctrines of the three vehicles, as well as how and when to express them to sentient beings.

Three Unshared Awakening Activities

13. Imbued with wisdom, the Buddha's bodily actions are always done to benefit others. He emanates diverse bodies that appear wherever sentient beings have the karma to be led on the path to awakening. Whatever *physical actions* the Buddha does — standing, lying, sitting, walking — automatically have a positive effect on sentient beings and subdue their minds.

14. Knowing the dispositions and interests of each sentient being, he teaches the Dharma in a manner appropriate for that person. His *speech* flows smoothly, is accurate, and lovely to hear. It does not deceive or lead others astray, but is clear, wise, and kind.

15. Filled with undeclining love and compassion, his *mind* encompasses all beings with the intention to do only what is of the highest benefit. He effortlessly and continuously cognizes all phenomena.

Three Unshared Pristine Wisdoms

Without obscuration or error, the Buddha's wisdom simultaneously knows everything in the (16–18) *past*, *future*, and *present*. His knowledge of the future does not mean that things are predetermined. Rather, the Buddha knows that if a sentient being does a particular action, a particular result will follow, and if another course of action is taken, a different result will

come. He knows all buddha fields and realms of sentient beings as well as all beings and their activities in them.

Two further excerpts from the *Questions of King Dhāraṇiśvara Sūtra* illustrate how the Buddha's qualities surpass those of bodhisattvas, śrāvaka learners, and arhats.[19]

> There, the Tathāgata's knowledge of the exhaustion of pollutions (*āsrava*, *āsava*) is completely purified, stainless, totally pure, clear light; all elaborations due to latencies are well destroyed. Śrāvakas' exhaustion of pollutants is measurable and the latencies are not well destroyed. Solitary realizers' exhaustion of pollutants is measurable; devoid of great compassion, they are devoid of courage. The Tathāgata's exhaustion of pollutants is endowed with the best of all aspects: all elaborations due to latencies are well destroyed. [The Tathāgata is] always upheld by great compassion, fearless, not devoid of courage, not outshone by all the worlds, endowed with one instant of mind. Why? The Tathāgata has no latencies of karma, no latencies of afflictions, no latencies of faulty behavior.

And

> It is like this: For example, the sky is totally pure by nature, not abiding together with dust and smoke. Likewise, the Tathāgata's knowledge of the exhaustion of pollutants does not abide together with the latencies of karma and afflictions. Immediately upon thoroughly abiding in such exhaustion of pollutants, he teaches the Dharma in order for sentient beings with pollutants and with appropriation to exhaust the pollutants and abandon appropriation.
>
> Saying, "O sentient beings, arisen from constantly conceptualizing the imperfect, you should realize individually just exactly as they are the pollutants and appropriations," the Tathāgata teaches the Dharma to them with examples that set out this and that [so that] they will, by all means, thoroughly know just exactly as they are the pollutants as imperfect, and having thoroughly known, by not appropriating any phenomena whatsoever, will also totally pass beyond sorrow.

While ārya śrāvakas may have some of the above qualities, they are not motivated to attain all of them and do not use them to benefit others in the same way ārya bodhisattvas do. For example, bodhisattvas employ the first

three of the eight liberations not to unify the mind in samādhi but to develop skill in making emanations, an ability that is crucial to benefit sentient beings. Some śrāvakas develop this ability, others do not. Similarly, although all ārya bodhisattvas cultivate the ability to remember previous lives and know the passing away and rebirth of all sentient beings — a skill necessary to benefit sentient beings most effectively — only some śrāvakas do.

These sūtra passages give us an idea of the Buddha's magnificent qualities. Contemplating them brings joy in our hearts and expands our mental horizons. It enhances our respect and admiration for the awakened ones as well as for the bodhisattva path they practiced that enabled them to gain those abilities. Furthermore, recollection of the Awakened One's excellent qualities inspires us to follow the same path he did so that we can provide sentient beings with the same support and relief from duḥkha that he did.

Qualities of the Buddha's Body, Speech, and Mind

Tsongkhapa praises the Buddha (LC 1:32):

> I bow my head to the chief of the Śākyas,
>
> whose body was formed by ten million perfect virtues,
>
> whose speech fulfills the hopes of limitless beings,
>
> whose mind sees precisely all knowable objects.

Śākyamuni Buddha did not come into being independent of causes and conditions; his body was formed by a vast array of perfect virtues. He was once an ordinary being like us, but through enthusiastically and diligently creating the myriad causes for awakening, he attained full awakening. Because the path to buddhahood involves a causal process and because we have the basic "raw material" of the buddha nature, we too can create the causes to become buddhas.

Buddhas are able to manifest an infinite number of emanations simultaneously. Appearing in whatever form is most suitable to communicate with specific sentient beings, they appear throughout the universe wherever sentient beings have created the karma to be receptive to their awakening influence. Although these emanations appear to be ordinary people, their bodies are not made of atoms. A buddha's emanation body is pleasing to look at but does not generate attachment in the viewer. In the case of a supreme emanation body such as Śākyamuni Buddha, it has

the thirty-two signs and eighty marks of a great person, which include the crown protrusion and the impression of a thousand-spoke Dharma wheel on the palms of the hands and soles of the feet. Each of these signs is the result of having practiced specific virtuous deeds. In the Sanskrit tradition, the signs and marks and their causes are detailed in the Perfection of Wisdom sūtras, Nāgārjuna's *Precious Garland* (176–97), and Maitreya's *Ornament of Clear Realizations* (*Abhisamayālaṃkāra*). The thirty-two signs are spoken of in the Pāli *Sutta of the Marks* (*Lakkhana Sutta*, SN 30) and the *Brahmāyu Sutta* (MN 91); the eighty marks are mentioned in Pāli commentarial literature.

The principal way in which buddhas benefit sentient beings is by teaching the Dharma — giving us the tools to create the causes for our own well-being and awakening. In that way, their speech fulfills the hopes of limitless beings — both our temporal and ultimate aspirations and welfare. Being aware of this, we should take every opportunity possible to listen to, reflect, and meditate on the Awakened One's teachings.

The *Sūtra Revealing the Inconceivable Secret of the Tathāgata* (*Tathāgata-cintya-guhyanirdeśa Sūtra*) and commentaries to the *Ornament of Mahāyāna Sūtras* (*Mahāyāna-sūtrālaṃkāra*) speak of sixty or more magnificent qualities of buddhas' speech through which they guide sentient beings to fortunate rebirths, liberation, and full awakening. When a buddha speaks, each person understands exactly what is most helpful for him or her to hear at that time. For one person, the teaching is about impermanence, for another it concerns emptiness, and for a third it teaches compassion. A buddha's voice is melodious and brings harmony and peace to the minds of the listeners. Never harsh or cruel, a buddha's words are always inspiring; they reinforce and enhance our ability to integrate the Dharma and eliminate our doubts. Like a lion's roar, a buddha's speech conquers extremist views; like the bellow of an elephant, it makes the Dharma known without hesitation; like Brahmā's melodious voice, sentient beings can listen to it without becoming weary. When someone's mind is ready, no matter where she is or what circumstances she is in, a buddha's speech will ripen her mind, stimulating her to gain understanding and realizations.

The Buddha's mind directly and simultaneously knows all existents — ultimate truths and conventional truths — without discord. No sentient being has this ability. The Buddha's omniscient mind has two aspects: from the perspective of it seeing emptiness, it is called the "pristine wisdom knowing things as they are"; from the perspective of it perceiving the entire diversity and variety of phenomena, it is called the "wisdom knowing the varieties."

REFLECTION

Sometimes the descriptions of the Buddha's qualities are so magnificent that they seem incomprehensible to us. Try this practical way to get an idea of what it would be like to be a buddha:

1. Imagine that all your anger, resentment, and spite are gone forever, not because they are repressed but because their seeds are no longer in your mindstream. No matter how other people treat you or speak to you, your mind remains calm and your only thought is for that person's well-being.
2. Imagine that all attachment, emotional neediness, craving, and clinging no longer exist in your mindstream because the potential for them to be there has been eliminated. You live without frustration, moodiness, and disappointment.
3. Imagine having every good quality that you admire: impartial love and compassion, generosity free from even the trace of stinginess or fear, and stable fortitude that enables you to remain calm no matter what you encounter.
4. Feel admiration and reverence for those holy beings who have such qualities and be confident that you can create the causes to have them too.

The Buddha as a Reliable Guide

To commence the *Compendium of Reliable Cognition* (*Pramāṇasamuccaya*), Dignāga (480–540) pays homage to the Buddha:

> I bow to the one who has become a reliable [guide], [starting out] intent on benefiting migrating beings, [followed by generating the wisdom that] serves as the way, [then reaching the state of] the One Gone to Bliss, [and finally emerging as] the Protector.

Commenting on this, Dharmakīrti (600–60) says in chapter 2 of *Commentary on the "Compendium of Reliable Cognition"* (*Pramāṇavārttika*):

> Out of compassion he states what is best [for the listener], and through his pristine wisdom he says what is true. Since he is intent upon stating that which is best and true along with the means to realize it, he is reliable. He is praised as reliable in that his teaching is of that kind, and the purpose of praising him in that fashion is to establish the nature of what is reliable through that teaching.

The Buddha is one who has transformed himself into a reliable being. Saying that he "has *become* a reliable guide" indicates that the Buddha is not an absolute or independently existing being who has possessed magnificent qualities from the beginning. Rather, he cultivated a compassionate

intention and the wisdom realizing selflessness and stabilized them in his mind over a long period of time. In this way, he abandoned all defilements, developed all excellent qualities, and is capable of teaching others what to practice and abandon on the path through his own experience. By following the same path, we can do the same.

Why do we want to establish the Buddha as a reliable guide? If we are Buddhist practitioners who seek liberation and awakening, we need to know what to practice and what to abandon to reach our spiritual goals. We don't know this on our own and need a teacher, and it is imperative that this teacher be unmistaken. If we follow an unreliable teacher who imparts fallacious teachings, we risk confusing virtue and nonvirtue, and as a result falling to an unfortunate rebirth. For this reason, we want to establish that the Buddha is an authoritative guide who teaches the unmistaken path.

Each of the reasons in Dignāga's praise illustrates why the Buddha is reliable: (1) Because he started out intent on benefiting migrating beings, (2) he strove to gain the true path, the wisdom realizing selflessness. (3) This wisdom led him to attain the state of the One Gone to Bliss (*Sugata*) who has perfect abandonments and realizations, and (4) in that way he became a reliable and trustworthy Protector-Guide who teaches the four truths from his own experience. Each of these attributes builds on the previous one, culminating in the Buddha being a reliable spiritual guide for those seeking temporal happiness in saṃsāra and the highest goodness of liberation and full awakening.

These attributes are expressed in a series of syllogisms, as was the tradition in ancient India.[20] They show how the person of the previous mental continuum of the Buddha successively gained realizations, attained awakening, and became a reliable guide. That is, before Śākyamuni became the Buddha, he had beginningless previous lifetimes during which he was many different beings — a deer, a monarch, and so forth. The first syllogism of the forward order speaks about the bodhisattva he was in a previous life who had just generated uncontrived bodhicitta; it shows why he was capable of generating the wisdom directly realizing selflessness. The second syllogism speaks of the person that the Buddha was in a previous life when he was on the bodhisattva path of seeing and shows why that person was suitable to become the Sugata.

The syllogisms are presented in a forward and a reverse order.

Forward Order

The forward order follows the sequence in the verse of homage. The Buddha being a reliable or authoritative guide is what is to be proven, and one intent on benefiting migrators, the Teacher, the Sugata, and the Protector are the reasons that establish this. Of these four, the one intent on benefiting migrators and the Teacher are excellent causes that lead to the excellent results of the Sugata and Protector.

1. Consider the person of the same mental continuum as the Buddha, who has just attained the bodhisattva path of accumulation: he is suitable to give rise to the Teacher — that is, the wisdom realizing selflessness — because he is an ordinary bodhisattva endowed with great compassion.

We can understand that this person had great compassion by reading stories in the scriptures that relate his practice as a bodhisattva in previous lifetimes. By familiarizing himself with contrived compassion, this person is able to gain uncontrived compassion because compassion is a mental quality that can continue to increase and become stable with repeated practice. Motivated by great compassion he is unwaveringly *intent on benefiting migrating beings* who wander from one saṃsāric realm to another under the control of afflictions and karma; he is totally dedicated to working for their welfare.

Seeing sentient beings repeatedly tormented by duḥkha and totally ignorant of the correct means to escape from this desperate situation, he seeks and finds the liberating path and cultivates the *wisdom directly realizing selflessness* — the pristine wisdom that enables him to gradually eradicate all defilements from his mental continuum. In this way, he surpasses practitioners who habituate themselves with erroneous philosophies and whose meditation only reinforces self-grasping.

As a sharp-faculty disciple, he had inferentially realized selflessness before generating the compassionate intention. Now his wisdom, which is conjoined with bodhicitta, directly realizes selflessness. This wisdom is now called "the Teacher" in the sense that it paves the way for him to become a teacher. This is so because based on his own experience of directly knowing selflessness, he is capable of leading or "teaching" himself the method to generate the path to awakening in his mindstream, thus fulfilling the goal of his compassion. For this reason, the phrase "the wisdom that serves as the way" in Dignāga's verse is translated as "the Teacher" in Tibetan. This is a case of giving the name of the result (Teacher) to the cause (the wisdom realizing emptiness) because this wisdom enables him to proceed on the path to becoming a Teacher.

2. Consider the person in the same continuum as the Buddha, who is on the liberated path of the bodhisattva's path of seeing: he is suitable to

give rise to the Sugata whose abandonments have three distinctive features, because he is a bodhisattva who has directly realized selflessness and is familiarizing his mind with this realization.

Having familiarized himself with bodhicitta and wisdom for a long time and by directly realizing the complementary nature of subtle dependent arising and emptiness, he is well poised to abandon all obscurations and realize all good qualities and knowledge. He will reach the culmination of the spiritual path and become the Sugata, the One Gone to Bliss — the one who understands well (*su*) and goes to the ultimate peace of nonabiding nirvāṇa (*gata*), at which time his qualities of abandonment (true cessations) will have three special features.

The three distinctive features of the Sugata's abandonments are excellent, irreversible, and complete. (a) *Excellent abandonment* indicates that unlike non-Buddhists, he has abandoned all afflictions. (b) *Irreversible abandonment* means that these afflictions have been abandoned in such a way that they will never return. This distinguishes him from śrāvaka āryas, such as stream-enterers and so forth, who are still reborn in saṃsāra due to afflictions and karma. (c) *Complete abandonment* shows that all cognitive obscurations have been abandoned, distinguishing the Sugata from śrāvaka arhats who still have those obscurations.

3. Consider the Ārya Buddha in the same continuum as the bodhisattva at the end of his continuum as a sentient being, who has just attained the first moment of omniscience: he is suitable to be the Protector, who perfectly works for the welfare of others and protects sentient beings by teaching them the four truths, because he is a being who has discovered the Sugata whose abandonments have three distinctive features.

As one who has accomplished the entire path, he is fully capable of protecting sentient beings from cyclic existence. He does this by teaching us the path of the four truths and the method to actualize nirvāṇa based on his own experience and insight. Being fully perfected himself, the Buddha does not need to depend on other teachers. He is not lackadaisical, but spontaneously reaches out and connects with sentient beings in all possible ways.

4. Consider the Sage, the Buddha: he is proven to be an authoritative, reliable being for those who seek liberation because he is a being with the Protector, the perfect welfare of others, in his continuum.

Having eradicated all afflictions, the Buddha could have remained in personal nirvāṇa, but due to his compassion, he chose to teach and guide us. Because the Buddha is one who progressed by means of perfecting the above four attributes, he is a reliable, trustworthy, and nondeceptive

spiritual guide. Not seeking wealth, fame, or service, his motivation is pure. His wisdom is unobstructed and he has no reason to lie. For these reasons, we can trust his teachings. Knowing this increases our confidence in the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha and eliminates doubts about the viability of the path the Buddha set forth.

All four attributes are necessary to be a perfectly trustworthy guide who teaches a complete path. Imagine someone who has great compassion but lacks the wisdom to free himself from cyclic existence. Consider someone who has realized the ultimate nature but lacks great compassion and enthusiasm to guide others. Imagine if someone's realizations were not complete, yet he tried to guide us. Because the Buddha has great compassion and the wisdom realizing selflessness and his abandonments are complete, those of us who wish to free ourselves from saṃsāra can rely on him. We will not be disappointed and will not be led astray.

Reverse Order

The reasoning of one nature is used in the forward order by showing that he (the subject of each syllogism) has the nature of being suitable to advance to the next level. Causal reasoning is used in the reverse order in that he (the subject of each syllogism) is preceded by his cause.

1. Consider the Buddha (who is a reliable guide): he was preceded by the Protector, the perfect welfare of others that was his cause, because he is a being who is a consummate guide who unerringly teaches what to adopt and what to abandon in the four truths to those seeking liberation and awakening.

As we learn and practice the four truths, we gain more conviction in the Buddha as an unmistaken and reliable guide. Although we ordinary beings are not yet able to know the sixteen aspects of the four truths by direct experience — one must be an ārya to do that — we can validate the Buddha's explanation of them by employing reasoning. Because he is an authoritative, trustworthy guide on the path who unerringly teaches the four truths with their sixteen aspects, we know the Buddha must have become that by being a Protector.

2. Consider the Buddha: he was preceded by the perfect realization, which has three distinctive features (of a Sugata) that was his cause, because he is a consummate being in possession of the Protector, the perfect welfare of others.

Because he is the Protector who teaches what to practice and what to abandon on the path, the Buddha is also the Sugata who has impeccable

realizations with three distinctive qualities: (a) *Excellent realization* — unlike non-Buddhists, he has realized the ultimate nature of reality. (b) *Irreversible or stable realizations* that never decline, unlike those of śrāvaka āryas on the paths of seeing or meditation. (c) *Complete realizations* — unlike śrāvaka arhats, he is omniscient and has realized all knowable objects and knows the methods to do so.

3. Consider the Ārya Buddha in the first moment of omniscience, who belongs to the same continuum as the Buddha: he was preceded by the wisdom that directly realizes selflessness (Teacher) that was his cause, because he is a being who has discovered the Sugata that has the three distinctive features of realization.

The Buddha became the Sugata by accomplishing the two principal causes: the wisdom realizing selflessness and great compassion that is intent on benefiting migrating beings. Wisdom, which is called "the Teacher," is identified because the sharpening of this wisdom is what enabled him to go from being an ordinary being to become a Sugata.

4. Consider the person in the same continuum as the Buddha, who is on the uninterrupted path of the bodhisattva's path of seeing: he was preceded by the great love and great compassion that are his causes, because he is a bodhisattva who has directly realized selflessness.

The person in the same continuum as the Buddha who had attained the wisdom that directly realized selflessness did so propelled by the motivation of great compassion that was intent on alleviating the duḥkha of each and every sentient being and working for their benefit.

I find it inspiring to contemplate the Buddha's qualities and reflect on the joyous effort motivated by compassion that he put forth to become a reliable guide for us. It also gives me a vision of what we can do in our lives to become reliable guides for others in the future.

Mātṛceṭa, a first-century Indian sage and poet, converted to Buddhism from Hinduism after being defeated in a debate by Āryadeva. At that time, he wrote the *Hymn to the Buddha* (*Śatapañcāśatka*), a stunning book praising the Buddha's qualities. Mātṛceṭa pays homage to the Buddha by way of the causes he created to attain awakening and his incomparability to other sages and teachers — his body, speech, compassion, teachings, benefits, and so on — all of which point to the Buddha's being a reliable guide. Praising the causes of the Buddha's awakening, Mātṛceṭa says:

> Having brushed aside doubts
>
> about whether or not it could be done,

of your own free will

you took this helpless world under your protection.

You were kind without being asked,

you were loving without reason,

you were a friend to the stranger

and a kinsman to those without kin.

Praising his incomparability, Mātṛceṭa says:

By not envying the superior,

despising the inferior,

or competing with equals,

you attained preeminence in the world.

You were devoted to virtues for their own sake,

not for the rewards that come from them.

Thus due to your right progress,

they have all come to completion within you.

These verses and others like them are helpful to read when contemplating the recollection of the Buddha.

The Buddha encouraged us not to rely on him or his teachings simply because others honor him and follow his doctrine. To the contrary, he encouraged people to practice the teachings and attain the same realizations and awakening he has. When they do, the Buddha said (MN 27):

> It is at this point that an ariya disciple comes to the conclusion: "The Blessed One is fully awakened, the Dhamma is well-proclaimed by the Blessed One, the Saṅgha is practicing the good way."

Recollection of the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha

A practice common to the Pāli and Sanskrit traditions is the six recollections — the recollection of Buddha, Dharma, Saṅgha, generosity, virtue, and deities.[21] The term "recollection" (*anusmṛti*, *anussati*) is a prefixed form of the word mindfulness (*smṛti*, *sati*). The Buddha instructed us to approach the recollections of the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha with

faith, effort, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom, qualities that comprise the five faculties and five powers found among the thirty-seven harmonies with awakening. In the Sanskrit tradition, this recollection is found in the *Sūtra Recollecting the Ārya Three Jewels* (*Ārya-ratnatraya-anusmṛti Sūtra*).[22] Here we will explain the shorter, commonly recited "Homage to the Three Jewels" from the *Mahānāma Sutta* (AN 6.10) in the Pāli canon.

The meaning of these verses is common to all Buddhist traditions. The explanation below generally follows Buddhaghosa's *Path of Purification* (Vism 6:2–100), with elements added from the Sanskrit tradition.

Recollection of the Buddha

The Pāli homage that recollects the Buddha reads (AN 6.10.1):

> The Bhagavān is an arahant, completely and perfectly awakened, accomplished in higher knowledge and conduct, one gone to bliss, knower of the world, supreme guide of beings to be tamed, teacher of devas and humans, the Buddha, the Bhagavān.

It is almost identical to the homage in the Sanskrit tradition that, translated from Tibetan, reads:

> To the Teacher, Bhagavān, Tathāgata, arhat, completely and perfectly awakened one, perfect in knowledge and good conduct, one gone to bliss, knower of the world, supreme guide of beings to be tamed, teacher of devas and humans, to you the Buddha, Bhagavān, glorious victor Śākyamuni, I prostrate, make offerings, and go for refuge.

Understanding each epithet of the Buddha reveals rich meanings.

Teacher. The Buddha taught the Dharma of the three vehicles according to the interests and dispositions of various disciples in order to gradually lead all sentient beings to full awakening.

Bhagavān. All ancient Indian traditions referred to their most exalted person as Bhagavān (Blessed One or World-Honored One). It signifies the respect and veneration given to one who is distinguished by special qualities as the highest of all beings. *Bhaga* indicates fortune, share, or possession. He is the one honored as the highest of all beings in the world due to possessing marvelous qualities. *Bhaga* also means "destroyed" — he has destroyed all defilements and the three poisons of attachment, animosity, and ignorance.

In the Tibetan translation of Bhagavān (*bcom ldan 'das*), *bcom* means to destroy — he has destroyed the four Māras of the polluted aggregates, afflictions, death, and the son of the gods;[23] *ldan* means endowed — he is endowed with the four bodies of a buddha and the five pristine wisdoms; *'das* means beyond — he has transcended both saṃsāra and an arhat's personal nirvāṇa.

Tathāgata (One Thus Gone, One Thus Come). "Tathāgata" also predates the Buddha and indicates a perfectly accomplished and realized person. The Buddha refers to himself as a fully awakened one, a tathāgata.

Buddhaghosa explained "Tathāgata" in eight ways, and Dhammapāla added even more explication. As mentioned above, the Buddha has gone thus to nirvāṇa in the same way that all liberated ones of the past have gone, by practicing the thirty-seven harmonies with awakening. He has come thus to buddhahood just as all the buddhas of the past have come, by fulfilling the ten perfections. By working for the benefit of the world, all tathāgatas thus have come to buddhahood. They convey the teaching of the deathless, to which they have gone by their own practice.

The Mahāyāna also explains the Tathāgata as one who has gone to the direct perception of all phenomena as well as their thusness (*tathatā*) or emptiness. He knows everything thus — as it is — and everything is just as he has said it to be. Chinese scriptures add that the Buddha came from thusness or emptiness.

Arhat was another term used in various ancient Indian traditions. As with Bhagavān and Tathāgata, the Buddha adopted this word and gave it a specific meaning according to his doctrine. "Arhat" has several meanings: (1) foe destroyer, because of having destroyed all afflictions and pollutants; (2) accomplished one, because of being liberated from saṃsāra; and (3) worthy one, because of being worthy of offerings and respect because he has destroyed all defilements and is free from saṃsāra. "Arhat" is not a term restricted to the Buddha but applies to all those who have destroyed the afflictions and are liberated from saṃsāra.

Completely and Perfectly Awakened One (*Samyaksaṃbuddha*, *Sammāsambuddha*). The Buddha has awakened from the sleep of ignorance and awakens others as well. He comprehends completely and perfectly all phenomena, especially the inner workings of the mind and the paths to liberation and awakening and their resultant states. As one who has completed the path, he possesses the ten powers of a buddha, the four fearlessnesses, and many other magnificent powers. His ability to explain the Dharma in a way that is easily understood by whatever audience he speaks to is indicative of his great knowledge and skill.

Whereas the early Pāli commentaries were more modest when speaking of the Buddha's knowledge, the second-century BCE commentary *Paṭisambhidāmagga* elaborated on seventy-two types of knowledge related to the Buddha's awakening, including omniscient and unobstructed knowledge of all phenomena — past, present, and future.

In general, the Pāli tradition considers the Buddha to be all-knowing, whereas the Sanskrit tradition considers him omniscient. In a Pāli sūtra (MN 71), the wanderer Vacchagotta directly asked the Buddha if he is omniscient such that whether he is walking, standing, sleeping, or awake "knowledge and vision are continuously and uninterruptedly present to him." The Buddha denied this and replied that he has the three higher knowledges: recollection of previous lives, knowledge of the death and rebirth of all sentient beings, and knowledge of the destruction of all pollutants together with full understanding of the four truths.

In another sūtra, the Buddha says (AN 4.23):

> In the world … whatever is seen, heard, sensed, and cognized, attained, searched into, pondered over by the mind — all that is fully understood by the Tathāgata … By comprehending all the world, all in the world just as it is, from all the world he is released: in all the world he clings to nothing.

Many Pāli commentators understand these passages to mean that although the Buddha knows all that is, everything does not appear to his mind simultaneously and continuously at all times.[24] Rather, all knowledge is available to him, but he must turn his mind to that topic. When he does, it will effortlessly appear because his mind is free from obstructions.

According to the Mahāyāna, the Buddha is fully omniscient; every existent — both veiled and ultimate truths — appears to his mind at all times. He comprehends all phenomena without mistake, as they actually are. The Buddha is completely and perfectly awakened because he has completed all qualities of body, speech, and mind perfectly, precisely as they should be. He has attained nonabiding nirvāṇa, abiding neither in saṃsāra nor in the personal peace of an arhat.

Perfect in Knowledge and Good Conduct (*Vidyā-caraṇa-saṃpanna*, *Vijjā-caraṇa-sampanna*). The Buddha is perfect in knowledge because he possesses the three higher knowledges, and he is perfect in good conduct because he lives with pure ethical conduct and has restrained his senses and is moderate in eating, drinking, sleeping, and so forth. He has also perfected all the various meditative absorptions. He is able to enter and arise from each of them easily and quickly and can train others to do the

same. The Buddha is endowed with knowledge — the higher training in wisdom — and its foundation — the higher trainings in ethical conduct and concentration. Alternatively, "knowledge" refers to the Buddha's wisdom and "good conduct" to his great compassion. With wisdom he knows all that is beneficial and harmful for sentient beings, and with compassion he acts to lead them away from harm and toward all that is beneficial and liberating.

One Gone to Bliss (*Sugata*). The Buddha is one gone to bliss because he has (1) gone along the sublime eightfold path, and (2) gone to the sublime state, the deathless state, nirvāṇa. As with several of the other epithets, this one was used by other spiritual groups as well.

According to the Sanskrit tradition, the one gone to bliss has two qualities: the realization of unpolluted wisdom and the complete abandonment of all objects to be abandoned. He has gone to bliss because he has reached the sublime state of nonabiding nirvāṇa and will never regress.

Knower of the World (*Loka-vid*, *Loka-vidu*). The Buddha knows the world in multiple ways. (1) He knows the conditioned world (*saṃskāraloka*, *saṅkhāraloka*) composed of the five aggregates, six sources, and eighteen constituents. He fully understands that the world is simply a collection of constantly changing conditioned phenomena, arising and ceasing in each moment without the involvement of a self, external deity, or permanent substance. He fully understands the twelve links — the process by which sentient beings enter cyclic existence — as well as the way to reverse this and attain liberation. (2) The Buddha knows the world of beings — each individual's disposition and interests, those who act well and those who don't, those of sharp faculties and those with modest faculties. (3) The Buddha knows the universe and the world systems existing in infinite space and time and can describe their dimensions and characteristics.

The epithets above describe the Buddha's personal realizations and attainments that establish him as fully awakened. The epithets below establish him as an excellent spiritual teacher and guide. Combining these, we see the Buddha has fulfilled his own purpose by attaining all realizations and abandoning all that is to be abandoned, and he has fulfilled others' purposes by being a spiritual teacher and leading sentient beings on the path to temporal and ultimate happiness.

Supreme Guide of Beings to Be Tamed (*Anuttara-puruṣa-damya-sārathi*, *Anuttaro purisa-damma-sārathī*). Able to lead everyone to liberation, including those who have committed great destructive karma, the Buddha

is the unsurpassed guide of all those whose minds are to be subdued. He guided to liberation Aṅgulimāla, who murdered 999 people, and by meditating on love he subdued the mad elephant that his cousin Devadatta unleashed to kill him.

Just as the driver of a cart guides the oxen, the Buddha guides those sentient beings capable of realizing the ārya path to that path. He restrains those who have acted contrary to the Dharma, steers those who have strayed to a wrong path back to the right one, and prods the lazy. As for those unruly ones whose karma is not right for them to encounter the path at this moment, he leaves them undisturbed.

Teacher of Devas and Humans (*śāstā deva-manuṣyāṇaṃ*, *Satthā devamanussānaṃ*). While the Buddha teaches all sentient beings, devas and humans are his main disciples because their inner and outer conditions are more suitable for practicing the path. The sūtras tell of the Buddha teaching devas who visited his vihara (monastic residence) in the middle of the night and of the Buddha visiting the Brahmā realm to teach the devas there.

Buddha. The Tibetan word for buddha is *sangye*. *Sangs* indicates the Buddha has awakened from the sleep of afflictions, and *rgyas* indicates he is omniscient, having expanded his awareness to all knowable objects.

Glorious (*śrī*). The Buddha is glorious because he is endowed with the perfection of high rebirth and highest goodness. In general, "high rebirth" refers to a fortunate rebirth, but since the Buddha is no longer subject to rebirth, this indicates he is capable of showing others how to create the causes for fortunate rebirths. "Highest goodness" indicates that he has attained full awakening and leads others to liberation and awakening as well.

Victor (*Jina*). The Buddha is victorious over the afflictive obscurations, the cognitive obscurations, and the four Māras.

Śākyamuni. The Buddha was born in the Śākya clan and is the Capable One or Sage (Muni) because he is capable of subduing the two obscurations.

These epithets give us much to contemplate by illustrating the Buddha's qualities and the reasons he is a reliable object of refuge. They provide insight into the Dharma he practiced that enabled him to attain those qualities, and the realizations the Saṅgha actualize as they follow the same path. Inspired to practice the path, we feel grateful that the Buddha has shared the precious Dharma methods with us.

Recollection of the Buddha can soothe our hearts in times of physical, mental, or spiritual duress. Tsongkhapa reflects (PDA 44–45):

> Here too, as I reflect on your [the Buddha's] words, I think,
> "Blazing with the glory of noble signs
> and hallowed in a net of light rays,
> this teacher, in a voice of pristine melody,
> spoke thus in such a way."
> The instant such a reflection of the Sage's form
> appears in my mind it soothes me,
> just as the moon-rays heal fever's pains.

REFLECTION

1. Imagine the Buddha in the space in front of you and recollect the qualities mentioned in the epithets.
2. Reflect on other qualities of the Buddha, such as the four types of self-confidence, the ten powers, and the eighteen unique qualities.
3. Let the feeling of trust in the Buddha arise and, with faith in his ability to guide you to awakening, take refuge in him. You may recite a verse or put it in your own words.

Recollection of the Dharma

> The Dhamma well-expounded by the Bhagavān,
> to be seen here and now, immediate,
> inviting one to come and see, applicable,
> to be personally experienced by the wise.

The verse of recollection of the Dharma (AN 6.10.2) points out several of its magnificent qualities.

Well-expounded. Unlike the other qualities of the Dharma that pertain only to the transcendental Dharma (true path and true cessation), "well-expounded" applies to the scriptures as well. The transmitted Dharma is well-expounded because it is good in the beginning, middle, and end. A scripture's introduction describes the circumstances in which it was taught, its body has a clear meaning that is explained using reason and examples, and its conclusion culminates by generating faith in those who hear or study it. All aspects of the teachings show us how to live a life of purity and

purpose. In addition, the Dharma wisely instructs us to begin by practicing ethical conduct, to practice serenity (*śamatha*, *samatha*) and insight (*vipaśyanā*, *vipassanā*) in the middle, and at the end to attain nirvāṇa.

The Dharma is pure in its meaning and detail. It is pure in meaning because its intention is profound — to help us cross the ocean of saṃsāra — and it is pure in detail because its words are clear. There is nothing that needs to be added or removed to improve the Dharma. Whereas other spiritual traditions do not correctly identify the obscurations to be abandoned, the Buddhadharma explains this correctly and without distortion. Because the Dharma is accurate in all respects, practicing it will lead us to realize nirvāṇa.

The supramundane Dharma consists of the four śrāvaka paths and the four fruits of those paths, the bodhisattvas' paths and grounds, and nirvāṇa. This Dharma is the middle way between asceticism and self-indulgence and between absolutism and nihilism. It is the ultimate refuge, true peace. Can anything better than this ever be expounded?

To be seen here and now. The ārya paths and nirvāṇa can be experienced here and now by abandoning obscurations. Those who have actualized the ārya paths do not obsess over their own or others' afflictions or the objects of affliction, and thus they do not experience mental misery. Those who have realized the Dharma are sure of their knowledge and do not need to blindly believe another person in order to know what they have already realized directly. Based on the correct view, the Dharma is worthwhile to learn because it frees us from the fears and dangers of saṃsāra.

Immediate. The supramundane Dharma bears immediate results. The uninterrupted paths that overcome a portion of afflictions last one moment and are immediately followed by the liberated paths that are free from those afflictions.

Inviting one to come and see. This is the famous Pāli phrase *ehipassa-vidhi* (P. *ehipassika*) with which the Buddha invites us to "come and see this Dharma." He asks us to investigate and test the Dharma and to experience it for ourselves. This Dharma invites verification, and we are encouraged to verify it for ourselves through intelligent analysis and by applying it to our lives and experiencing the Dharma ourselves. Unlike a deceptive person whose purse is empty but says, "I have money," and unlike a person who thinks a fool will buy his container of rubbish, the Buddha encourages us to inspect and engage with his teachings and discover their purity for ourselves.

Applicable. The uninterrupted and liberated paths lead to nirvāṇa, which then becomes our shelter and true refuge.

To be personally experienced by the wise. We should not take the Dharma on blind faith, but must learn and practice it ourselves. We cannot hire someone else to do this for us or hope that when our friend attains nirvāṇa, it will magically rub off on us too. The ārya paths cannot be known with our five senses; they are known only by our mind. The Dharma is the province of the wise; the foolish who are distracted with the seeming pleasures of cyclic existence cannot fathom, let alone come close to it. However, if we understand and practice the Dharma correctly, it will lead us to its stated results.

Recollection of the Saṅgha

> The Saṅgha of the Bhagavān's disciples is practicing the good way,
>
> the Saṅgha of the Bhagavān's disciples is practicing the straight way,
>
> the Saṅgha of the Bhagavān's disciples is practicing the true way,
>
> the Saṅgha of the Bhagavān's disciples is practicing the proper way;
>
> that is, the four pairs of persons, the eight types of individuals,
>
> the Saṅgha of the Bhagavān's disciples,
>
> is worthy of gifts, is worthy of hospitality,
>
> is worthy of offerings, is worthy of respect,
>
> is the unsurpassed field of merit for the world.

Recollection of the Saṅgha (AN 6.10.3) involves reflecting on the qualities of the community of disciples. They are a community because they practice a common ethical code and share the same view. This community practices the good, straight, true, and proper way. Those following the Śrāvaka Vehicle form four pairs: those who have attained the path and fruit of stream-enterer, once-returner, nonreturner, and arhat. The Saṅgha also includes ārya bodhisattvas and buddhas.

Practicing the good way. The āryas have gained their realizations by practicing the correct way that accords with how things are and that leads irreversibly to nirvāṇa. The Saṅgha practices the Dharma and the Vinaya, and thus not only actualizes these themselves but also preserves them for future generations.

Practicing the straight way. By following the middle way, free from the two extremes, the Saṅgha practices in a straightforward way without being crooked or off track.

Practicing the true way. The Saṅgha's aim is nirvāṇa, which is true and nondeceptive.

Practicing the proper way. The Saṅgha's practice follows the footsteps of those who are worthy of veneration.

Is worthy of hospitality. Since the ārya Saṅgha practices properly, Saṅgha members are worthy to receive gifts of the four requisites — food, clothing, shelter, and medicine — so they can continue their practice. These gifts bear auspicious fruit for the donors due to the virtue and pure practice of the recipients.

Is worthy of offerings. Offerings given to the Saṅgha bear good results for the donor. This is not "spiritual business" — we should not give offerings to the Saṅgha only to receive merit in return. Rather, our offerings are expressions of our heartfelt rejoicing in the practice and spiritual qualities of those who live with pure ethical conduct, generate compassion and bodhicitta, and gain wisdom of the ultimate nature.

Is worthy of respect. By respecting the qualities of realized beings, we make ourselves receptive to develop those same wonderful qualities.

Is the unsurpassed field of merit for the world. When rice seeds are sown in a fertile field, a munificent crop will result. Similarly, the Saṅgha, with the Buddha as its head, is the supreme field where we can grow a bountiful crop of virtue. This comes through making offerings and venerating them with a joyful, appreciative, and humble attitude.

To meditate on the qualities of the Three Jewels, we recollect those qualities one by one and reflect deeply on the reasons the Three Jewels have them. We contemplate, "For this reason the Buddha is a tathāgata, for this reason, he is an arhat," and so forth. Many benefits arise from this reflection.

Conclude your meditation session on the qualities of the Three Jewels by reflecting, How fortunate I am to have encountered these precious objects of refuge. I can truly trust their guidance because through having practiced the same instructions they now teach, they realized those noble spiritual qualities and aims. Feel deep trust and confidence in the Three Jewels and let that calm uplift your mind. A discouraged or depressed attitude cannot exist at the same time as the mind inspired by recollecting the qualities of the Three Jewels.

You may also conclude your meditation session by thinking, "How fortunate we are that there are holy beings in this universe with the wise and compassionate qualities of the Three Jewels! By following their guidance and subduing our mind, we will create goodness in ourselves and in the world. Feel hopeful, optimistic, and joyful to do your spiritual practice."

Another way to conclude your recollection is to reflect, "Just as the Buddha practiced the Dharma, abandoned all defilements, and realized all excellent qualities, I can also do this. He taught the path so that I and others will put the teachings into practice and emulate them by actualizing the same realizations for the benefit of sentient beings. To fulfill the purpose of the Three Jewels and the hopes of suffering sentient beings, I will practice earnestly."

The Buddha advised his disciples that when fear or terror arose in them — for example, when they lived alone in the forest — they should recollect the Awakened One's qualities, "For when you recollect me, monastics, whatever fear or trepidation or terror you may have will be abandoned." If they could not recollect the Buddha, he instructed them to recollect the Dharma, and if that was not possible, then to recollect the Saṅgha and the same benefits will accrue (SN 11.3).

Many benefits accrue to one who recollects the Three Jewels. The Buddha said (AN 6.10.1):

> At that time, the ariya disciple's mind is not obsessed by attachment, animosity, or ignorance; on that occasion his mind is simply straight, based on the Tathāgata (Dhamma, Saṅgha). An ariya disciple whose mind is straight gains inspiration in the meaning, gains inspiration in the Dhamma, gains happiness connected to the Dhamma. When he is happy, joy arises. For one with a joyful mind, the body becomes tranquil. One tranquil in body feels pleasure, for one feeling pleasure, the mind becomes concentrated. This is called an ariya disciple who dwells in balance amid an unbalanced population, who dwells unafflicted amid an afflicted population.

Recollection of the Buddha enables practitioners to suppress the five hindrances that impede serenity. Their mental factors of investigation and analysis are firmly placed on the Buddha's magnificent qualities. As these develop, joy arises. With joy, physical and mental disturbances are pacified, and their bodies and minds become pliant and tranquil. This leads to physical and mental bliss, which in turn produces concentration. Through

the arising of these dhyānic factors, practitioners attain access concentration (P. *upacāra samādhi*). This concentration is called "recollection of the Buddha" because that recollection was the means by which it was attained.

Recollection of the Buddha produces marked effects on all aspects of practitioners. They become humble and respect the Buddha. Their faith, mindfulness, wisdom, and merit increase, as do their joy and bliss. Fear and dread no longer plague them, and they can endure pain without difficulty. They feel as if they are in the presence of the Buddha, and their minds seek to develop the Buddha's qualities. They are naturally conscientious, and should the opportunity to act unethically arise, their integrity and consideration for others arise clearly, as if they were in the Buddha's presence. They will definitely have a fortunate rebirth and may continue to practice and develop actual dhyāna and insight. In short, the recollections of the Three Jewels not only deepen our refuge but also strengthen our commitment and ability to maintain pure ethical conduct and increase our concentration.

Recollection of the Buddha plays an important role in the Sanskrit tradition. The Pure Land practice, popular in East Asia, takes the recollection of the Buddha Amitābha as its principal practice, and through it one cultivates serenity and insight. Tibetan Buddhists often use a visualized image of the Buddha as the object upon which to cultivate serenity, and in Vajrayāna, practitioners not only recollect the Buddha's qualities but also meditate on the Buddha they will become by imagining having those qualities now.

REFLECTION

1. Reflect on the excellent qualities of the Buddha one by one, thinking, the Buddha is the Teacher because ... (remember the meaning of a Teacher). Do this for each of the Buddha's excellent qualities.
2. Reflect on the excellent qualities of the Dharma one by one, thinking, the Dharma is well-expounded because ... (remember the meaning of being well-expounded). Do this for each of the Dharma's excellent qualities.
3. Reflect on the excellent qualities of the Saṅgha one by one, thinking, the Saṅgha practices in the good way because ... (remember the meaning of practicing in the good way). Do this for each of the Saṅgha's excellent qualities.
4. Conclude your reflection by considering your fortune of having encountered the Three Jewels.

Distinguishing Features of the Three Jewels

The Three Jewels harmoniously direct us toward the same spiritual aims. Yet each jewel has its own distinguishing features and a distinct role that it plays in guiding us. Understanding these expands the meaning of taking refuge in them. Asaṅga explains six distinguishing features in his *Compendium of Determinations* (*Viniścaya-samgrahaṇī*).

Someone may ask, "Each of the Three Jewels has so many magnificent qualities. Is it sufficient to take refuge in only one of them?" Taking refuge in all three is important because we relate to each jewel differently, owing to their differences in defining characteristics, awakening influence, distinct qualities, the way of appreciating them, our practice in relation to them, and our creation of merit in relation to them.

In their *defining characteristics*, the buddhas are those who have abandoned all defects and developed all good qualities limitlessly. They are omniscient and are able to know both ultimate and conventional truths simultaneously. The Dharma Jewel consists of true paths and true cessations, which, when actualized in our mind, are the real protection from duḥkha. The Buddha appeared in our world to teach us how to actualize the Dharma Jewel, and in doing so he fulfilled our wishes. The Saṅgha Jewel consists of āryas who have realized the Dharma and are qualified to guide us so we can do the same. They demonstrate the correct practice and prove the validity and usefulness of the Buddha's teachings.

When it comes to their *awakening influence*, the Buddha teaches us the transmitted Dharma in the most effective manner and instructs us what to practice and abandon on the path. The Dharma Jewel eliminates duḥkha and its causes, the afflictions. The Saṅgha Jewel gives us encouragement, inspiration, and assistance in practicing. Their joy in study and practice invigorates us, and their presence reassures us that we are not alone on the path.

We *recollect the distinct qualities* of each of the Three Jewels: The buddhas are free from ignorance, anger, and attachment; they have supreme wisdom and compassion and know all phenomena as clearly as we see a button in our palm. When practiced correctly, the Dharma brings good results in the beginning, middle, and end. The Saṅgha is on the right path. Being impartial, Saṅgha members are true friends and objects of respect. We can count on their companionship and support on the path.

We show our *appreciation*, respect, and gratitude for each of the Three Jewels in a particular way by making offerings, being of service, respecting the buddhas, putting the Dharma into practice so that it transforms our mind, and practicing together with the Saṅgha and joining in their efforts to make Dharma a healing force in the world.

In terms of our *practice*, the buddhas are the role models we emulate. We prostrate, make offerings, and serve and respect them to create the merit enabling us to attain their excellent qualities. We familiarize ourselves with the Dharma, practicing and meditating on it and integrating it with our body, speech, and mind. We practice harmoniously together with the Saṅgha, sharing teachings and material goods with them and following their good example.

We *create and increase our merit* in relation to each of the Three Jewels in a distinct manner. We offer, prostrate, and serve the Buddha, and we cultivate the Dharma in our mindstream. We engage in virtuous actions together with a Saṅgha of four or more fully ordained monastics who represent the Saṅgha Jewel, and we also make offerings, pay respect, and offer service to them.

REFLECTION

1. Why is each of the six distinguishing features important in your refuge practice?
2. For each of the six, make examples of how you have related to or could relate to each of the Three Jewels.

Causal and Resultant Refuge

As the Buddha's followers, we take refuge in the causal Three Jewels that guide us to awakening and the resultant Three Jewels we will become upon fulfilling our spiritual aspiration. The *Sublime Continuum* presents the resultant Three Jewels by linking them to the spiritual interests and dispositions of the three types of practitioners. That is, according to their disposition, disciples will have different resultant refuges that are their chief focus.

Even before entering a path, some followers are attracted to bodhicitta and have great admiration for the Buddha's qualities. They enter the Mahāyāna path and yearn to attain the qualities of a fully awakened buddha. As a result, they attain buddhahood. Thus the Buddha Jewel is said to be their main object of refuge.

Other disciples are attracted to the explanation of dependent origination and enter the Solitary Realizer Vehicle. Focusing their effort on realizing the forward and reverse orders of the afflictive and purified sides of the twelve links of dependent origination, they take the Dharma Jewel as their principal resultant refuge. By meditating on dependent origination,

they extinguish the causes of cyclic existence and become solitary-realizer arhats.

Another group of disciples are attracted to the four truths of the āryas. Entering the Śrāvaka Vehicle, they learn and meditate on the four truths and take the Saṅgha as their resultant refuge. Relying on the instructions of a Saṅgha member, they become a śrāvaka arhat. In short, the resultant refuge is specific to each individual according to his or her disposition, the path that appeals to them, and their principal spiritual goal.

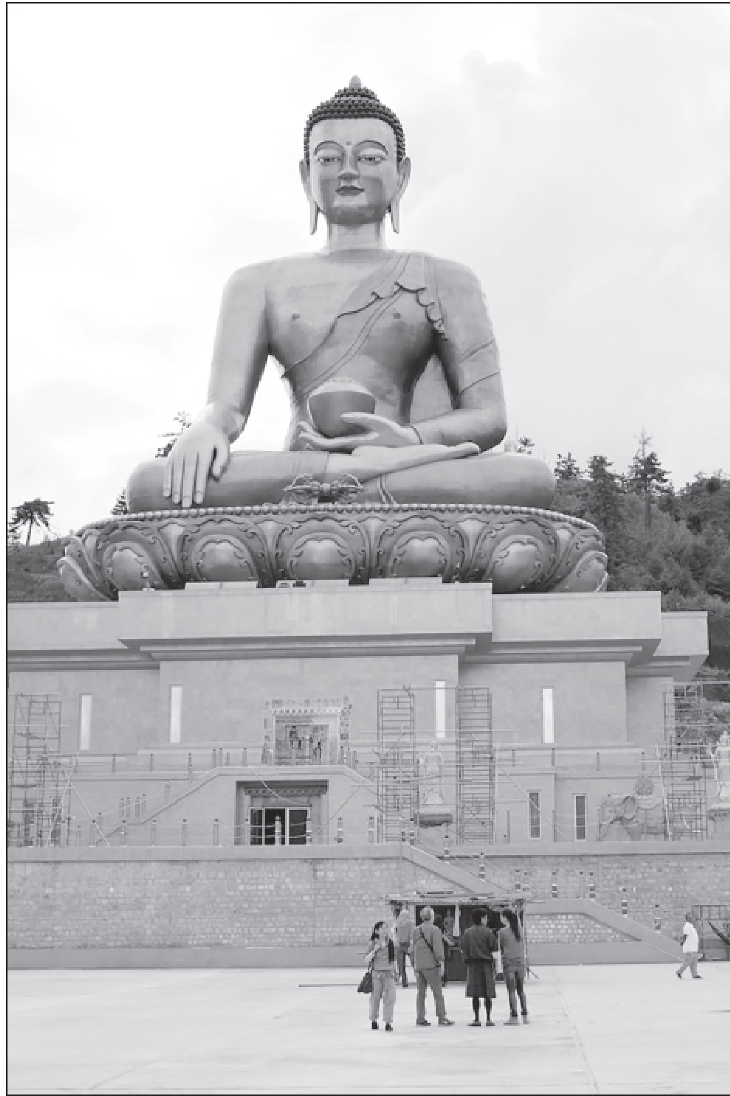
Although their resultant objects of refuge may differ, all three groups turn to the external Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha as their causal refuge. In this context, the Buddha refuge is our Teacher, Śākyamuni Buddha; the Dharma refuge is the true paths and true cessations in the mental continuums of āryas; and the Saṅgha refuge is the āryas of all three vehicles. All Buddhists, no matter which vehicle or Buddhist tradition they follow, take refuge in the causal Three Jewels. We create merit and purify negativities in relation to them by bowing, making offerings, revealing our misdeeds, rejoicing in our own and others' virtues, and so forth. By relying on the causal three objects of refuge, we receive teachings and guidance, practice the three higher trainings, generate love and compassion, realize the correct view of reality, and attain the awakening of the vehicle we enter.

We can also speak of the resultant Three Jewels in terms of the Three Jewels we will become in the future. From this perspective,[25] those of us who aspire for full awakening have as our resultant refuge the Buddha Jewel we will become in the future, the true paths and true cessations that will exist in our mindstream at that time, and the ārya buddhas we will become. At this time the natural buddha nature — the emptiness of our mind — will become the nature truth body of a buddha, and the transforming buddha nature will become the wisdom truth body of a buddha. Simultaneously with attaining the truth body, we will attain a buddha's enjoyment and emanation bodies, becoming the Buddha Jewel ourselves.

These resultant Three Jewels are our genuine protection from the duḥkha of saṃsāra. The true cessations and true paths in our mindstream when we become āryas are the actual refuge that will protect us. Meditating on impermanence, the defects of saṃsāra, love, compassion, bodhicitta, the correct view, and so on inches us forward on the path to become the Three Jewels. Even though our resultant Three Jewels do not exist now, they will exist in the future. Because we have the potential to actualize them, we can take refuge in the resultant Three Jewels now.

REFLECTION

1. What is your causal refuge? What is your resultant refuge?
2. How do they differ? In what ways are they the same?
3. How does the causal refuge help you to actualize the resultant refuge?



3 | Heartfelt Connection to the Three Jewels

IN THE PRECEDING CHAPTERS we identified the Three Jewels and learned their qualities. Reflecting on these moves the heart. First, we are assured that we are not alone on our spiritual journey, that millions of people have followed the path before us and attained the results of a tried-and-true path. We can trust their guidance.

Second, we have a vision of the spiritual journey we will take and the destination we will arrive at as a result of correct practice. We are not inherently limited beings, but like the Buddha who was once a sentient being and later became an awakened one, we too can follow that path and attain that result. This knowledge transforms our attitude about life into one with great purpose and a long-term perspective that brings reliance in the face of life's vacillations.

Formally Taking Refuge

Before taking refuge, it is important to know the qualities of the Three Jewels so that we are clear on whom and what we are entrusting our spiritual guidance to and whose instructions we plan to follow on the path. At a certain point in our spiritual journey, we may deeply feel that the Buddhist path resonates within us and we want to follow it. We can then formally take refuge in the Three Jewels during a ceremony.

Traditionally, the demarcation of becoming a Buddhist has been taking refuge. Some people hesitate to participate in a formal ceremony in which they repeat the refuge formula after a spiritual master. Other people want to take refuge formally, but the external conditions are not present. Participating in a ceremony is not necessary. What is important is that we have reflected on the

qualities of the Three Jewels, the reasons for taking refuge in them, and the meaning of doing so. Having done that, entrusting ourselves from our hearts to the Three Jewels for spiritual guidance because we recognize them as reliable objects of refuge is the real meaning of taking refuge.

Some people ask me if believing in rebirth is necessary to take refuge and become a Buddhist. They have learned some of the Buddha's teachings on developing fortitude, love, and compassion, for example, and find them meaningful. They have faith in the Buddha and want to take refuge. However, they are unclear regarding the existence of rebirth, karma, and other realms and do not find those teachings useful for their spiritual practice at present. In such a case, because these people have some faith and a good attitude toward the Dharma and a wish to strengthen these, I allow them to attend a refuge ceremony and consider themselves Buddhist if they wish.

However, some people do not agree with this. They say that the scriptures clearly delineate the causes for taking refuge in the Three Jewels: the person must have a sense of the danger of taking an unfortunate rebirth or of remaining in saṃsāra, faith and confidence in the ability of the Three Jewels to guide us from this danger, and in the case of a Mahāyāna practitioner, compassion and a wish that others be free from this danger. To have these three, a person must accept rebirth, karma, other realms of existence, and emptiness, otherwise taking refuge in the Three Jewels would not be of interest to them.

From my point of view, different levels of refuge in the Three Jewels exist, and people may enter at a level that is comfortable and appropriate for them at the present. This helps them on their spiritual path and encourages them to continue to learn and practice the Buddha's teachings.

To be a Buddhist, a person should trust in the Three Jewels. Some people do this without giving a lot of thought to past and future lives. Other people think about rebirth yet continue to question it even though they respect the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha. We can say that these people are about to become Buddhist. Similarly, some people may trust the Three Jewels but do

not immediately accept the teachings on selflessness and emptiness. All these people can still benefit from Buddhist teachings on ethical conduct, love, compassion, generosity, patience, and so on. For these reasons, I don't think that belief in rebirth must necessarily be a criterion for taking refuge in the Three Jewels.

You can practice the teachings that help you in your life and for the moment leave to the side the ones that you do not agree with or do not understand. You do not need to accept everything; forcing yourself to believe passages in the scriptures that do not make sense to you does not help you to progress. Continue to reflect on the teachings so that what you practice is based on reason. If something can be logically disproved or is not logically consistent, do not accept it even if it is written in a Buddhist scripture.

Initially, a spiritual seeker could trust Jesus, Buddha, God, and other gods, and synthesize them in their personal spiritual practice. But at a certain point this person will need to specialize. To develop further in Buddhist practice, understanding emptiness is very important. Once one fully accepts and is convinced regarding emptiness and dependent arising, accepting the concept of a creator God becomes difficult. Similarly, if someone decides to specialize in Christianity as it is generally taught, accepting the doctrine of emptiness may be difficult. Along the same line, if someone doesn't accept rebirth, then bodhicitta — which wants to liberate sentient beings from rebirth in saṃsāra — doesn't make sense. Thus for one who is a true Buddhist and who wishes to develop the altruistic intention of bodhicitta and become a buddha, belief in rebirth and emptiness are necessary to develop the realizations of the entire path.

In many Pāli sūtras, whenever non-Buddhists meet the Buddha, listen to his teachings, see their truth, and take refuge in the Three Jewels, they express their joy (MN 4.35).

> Magnificent, Master Gotama! Master Gotama has made the Dhamma clear in many ways, as though he were turning upright what had been overturned, revealing what was hidden, showing the way to one who was lost, or holding up a lamp in the dark for those with eyesight to see forms. I go to Master

> Gotama for refuge and to the Dhamma and to the Saṅgha of monastics. From today let Master Gotama remember me as a lay follower who has gone to him for refuge for life.

When preparing for the refuge ceremony, contemplate this and try to generate the same feeling in your heart.

When we take refuge during a ceremony, we take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha, not in a particular Buddhist lineage, teacher, or tradition. To take refuge formally in a ceremony, request a spiritual teacher whom you trust and respect to perform the ceremony. At that time, you may also request to receive any or all of the five lay precepts (*pañcaśīla*). These five are to abandon killing, stealing, unwise and unkind sexual behavior, lying, and taking intoxicants. Since the person from whom you receive refuge and precepts becomes one of your spiritual mentors, it is wise to consider well whom you request.[26] In the ceremony, the spiritual mentor will lead you in generating the aspiration to be free from cyclic existence and to attain liberation. With that strong motivation, you will kneel down and repeat the verse of taking refuge three times after the teacher.

> Venerable, please pay attention, from now until the end of my life, I, named _______, take refuge in the Buddha, the supreme among human beings; I take refuge in the Dharma, the supreme abandonment of craving; I take refuge in the Saṅgha, the supreme assembly. Venerable, please care for me as a Buddhist who takes refuge (and precepts).

Think deeply about what you say as you repeat this and generate a deep sense of faith and confidence in the Three Jewels, as well as a strong intention to follow the path to liberation. After reciting this verse, your teacher will explain the refuge guidelines, which enable you to continue to deepen your refuge. If you wish, you may also request a refuge name.

Deepening Our Refuge

Taking refuge through a ceremony, while optional, can strengthen our feeling of connection to the Three Jewels. This feeling of connection must be consciously and continually cultivated afterward to reap the benefits of taking refuge. Taking refuge is not something we do once and then forget about. Rather, we begin every meditation session by taking refuge and cultivating a bodhicitta motivation. In this way, over time our refuge in the Three Jewels will deepen and become a tremendous source of inner strength, enabling us to greet whatever life brings with confidence, optimism, and purpose.

Studying and practicing the following guidelines will help you increase your mindfulness and deepen your refuge.

General Guidelines

In his *Compendium of Determinations* (*Viniścaya-samgrahaṇī*), Asaṅga recommends:

- In analogy to taking refuge in the Buddha, commit yourself wholeheartedly to a qualified spiritual mentor. It may take time to find such a spiritual mentor. Don't rush; remember the Buddha is our fundamental teacher.
- In analogy to taking refuge in the Dharma, listen to and study the teachings as well as put them into practice in your daily life.
- In analogy to taking refuge in the Saṅgha, respect the Saṅgha members as your spiritual companions and follow the good examples they set.
- Avoid being rough and arrogant, running after any desirable object you see.
- Avoid criticizing whatever meets with your disapproval.
- Be friendly and kind to others and be concerned more with correcting your own faults than with pointing out those of others.

- As much as possible avoid the ten nonvirtues,[27] and take and keep the eight one-day precepts.[28]
- Have a compassionate and sympathetic heart toward all other sentient beings.
- Make offerings to the Three Jewels on Buddhist festival days, such as new- and full-moon days, Vesak (the day of the Buddha's awakening), and other special holidays.

Guidelines for Each of the Three Jewels

1. Having taken refuge in the Buddha, who has purified all defilements and developed all qualities, do not turn for refuge to worldly deities, who lack the capacity to guide you from all problems.

Respect all images of the Buddha: do not put them in low or dirty places, step over them, point your feet toward them, or sell them to earn a living. Respecting statues and other images is not idol worship; it is mindful practice. When looking at various images, do not discriminate "this Buddha is beautiful, but this one is not," because the Buddha's body is never ugly. However, we can comment on the craftsmanship — some artistry is poor and some is magnificent. Do not treat with respect expensive and impressive statues while neglecting those that are damaged or less costly.

2. Having taken refuge in the Dharma, avoid harming any living being.

Respect the written words that describe the path to awakening by keeping the texts clean and in a high place. Avoid stepping over them, putting them on the floor, putting other things on top of them, such as your glasses, coffee cup, or other books, or throwing them in the rubbish when they are old. It is best to burn Dharma materials; they can also be recycled.[29]

3. Having taken refuge in the Saṅgha, do not cultivate the friendship of people who criticize the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha or who have unruly behavior or do many harmful actions. Be polite and compassionate toward them, but do not become

close friends because their views and attitude may have a detrimental influence on your refuge.

Respect monks and nuns, as they are people who are making earnest efforts to actualize the teachings. Respecting them helps your mind, because appreciating their qualities makes you open to learn from their example. By respecting even the robes of ordained beings, you will be happy and inspired when seeing them.

Common Guidelines

1. Mindful of the qualities, skills, and differences between the Three Jewels and non-Buddhist refuges, and mindful of the differences among the Three Jewels themselves, repeatedly take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha.

2. Remembering their kindness, make offerings to them, especially offering your food before eating.[30]

3. Mindful of their compassion, encourage others to take refuge in the Three Jewels.

4. Remembering the benefits of taking refuge, do so three times in the morning and three times in the evening by reciting and reflecting upon any of the refuge prayers.

5. Do all actions by entrusting yourself to the Three Jewels. Whatever happens — whether you are sick or well — rely on the Three Jewels. When you are nervous, anxious, or afraid — for example, before a job interview or when receiving the results of a medical test — take refuge in the Three Jewels. This will help you to recall the Dharma teaching that will be most helpful for you to contemplate in that situation.

6. Do not forsake your refuge at the cost of your life, or even as a joke. Treasure your refuge, respect your spiritual yearnings, and follow the path sincerely.

The refuge guidelines are explained well in the *Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path*. Please study that section.

Maintaining Proper Refuge

Since refuge in the Three Jewels is the demarcation of being a Buddhist, and deep trust in the Three Jewels is essential for a Buddhist's spiritual progress, we want to ensure that we keep our refuge purely. One of the guidelines for doing this is not to turn to other objects of refuge that lack the ability and the qualities to guide us to awakening.

Buddha Śākyamuni is our teacher. For this reason, an image of the Buddha is found at the center front of the altar in a Tibetan monastery. The Buddha is our guide, the one who reveals the path to awakening to us. We wholeheartedly entrust our spiritual well-being to him. If we feel remorse for having acted harmfully or having transgressed our precepts, we should confess and purify this in the Buddha's presence because we revere and admire him. When we have earnest spiritual aspirations, we should likewise address them to the Buddha.

However, this is often not the case. When Tibetans enter the temple, they pay homage to the Buddha, but many direct their attention to the corner of the hall, where there is a small, dark room that is the protector's shrine room. It is here that Tibetans experience a sense of awe and cultivate restraint from negative actions. In front of the protectors, they are terrified of their destructive karma. They make offerings to fierce-looking protectors rather than to the peaceful Buddha in the main temple. The monks in charge of the offering rituals to the protectors generate the most revenue. This indicates that people have not properly understood important elements of Buddhist practice.

Most Buddhist traditions speak of Dharma protectors, beings who help practitioners on the path. These Dharma protectors are of two types: supramundane and mundane. Supramundane protectors have directly realized emptiness and thus are included in the Saṅgha refuge — for example, Palden Lhamo and Mahākāla. Others, such as Nechung and the four great kings, are worldly beings who have made promises to great masters to protect the Dharma and practitioners. These protectors are not included in the Saṅgha refuge. We can rely on them for temporal help for virtuous

purposes in the same way we would rely on a powerful person to help us in time of need. However, we do not seek spiritual refuge in them.

Then there are spirits, who are of many levels and types. Just like human beings, some spirits are helpful and others harmful; some have clairvoyant powers, whereas others do not. Some have virtuous qualities; others are angry and spiteful. Spirits are still within cyclic existence, and while some people may seek their aid, caution is necessary.

I have noticed a trend for people who call themselves Buddhists to turn to spirits to attain worldly success. This is not beneficial for several reasons. First, because these beings help only in temporal ways, a practitioner's motivation will degenerate from one of bodhicitta to one of seeking wealth, reputation, or power. This clearly corrupts his Dharma practice.

Second, Buddhism does not accept the existence of an omnipotent being who can control what happens to us. When people worship spirits, they usually petition, "Please give me this. Please do that." It seems that in their minds they regard the spirits as quasi-omnipotent and think that pleasing them is the means to attain happiness. This runs counter to the Buddha's teachings on karma and its effects, in which he clearly stated that we are responsible for creating the causes for happiness through abandoning harmful actions and creating virtuous ones. We have to discipline our own minds and put effort into improving ourselves.

For example, as a simple monk who has faith in the path the Buddha set out, I must restrain my mind from negativities and be mindful to act constructively. Look at Milarepa. There was nothing in his cave, yet he became a great practitioner. He did not propitiate spirits to increase his wealth or fame or to make his religious institution successful.

If many people begin to pray to an external being for worldly success, the existence of Buddha's teachings will degenerate in our world. People will think, "If I worship this deity, I'll be rich; if I worship that one, I'll live long." They will neglect to observe karma and its effects and will cease refraining from destructive actions and

creating beneficial ones. Instead they will expect an external being to save them from suffering and bring them happiness, and they will teach that to others. When Buddhist practitioners think and act this way, the beneficial influence of Buddha's precious teachings in our world will decline.

Ordinary people everywhere prefer to look outside of themselves to obtain happiness and alleviate suffering. It is easy for them to mistake the pujas and ceremonies done in Tibetan Buddhism as the worship of inherently existent external beings. Because these ceremonies are colorful and entertaining, people are attracted to them, thinking that the performance of a puja in and of itself is virtuous. This is not correct; the virtue or merit created depends on the motivations of the practitioners and their ability to meditate on wisdom and compassion while performing the puja.

In saying this, we should not go to the other extreme and say that all pujas and all deities are irrelevant. The practices of meditation deities such as Avalokiteśvara, Mañjuśrī, Tārā, and so forth contain profound methods for purifying ignorance, attachment, and animosity, and for perfecting the six perfections. These deities are emanations of awakened qualities that appear in a physical representation so that we can relate to them. Their pujas are done with the aspiration for liberation, bodhicitta, and the wisdom realizing emptiness. Those who do these practices properly do not worship these deities as external, omnipotent gods.

Also, we must differentiate between the practice of an ordinary person and the practice of a highly realized master. If a highly realized master propitiates a spirit, he has the ability to control that spirit. The spirit respects and obeys this master, so there is no danger. However, an ordinary person who propitiates the same spirit is not able to do this, and thus the result of his asking for help becomes more uncertain. It is like two people dealing with a ferocious dog. If the master asks the dog to protect the house, the dog will obey. But if another person does, the dog may turn around and bite him.

Unfortunately, the propitiation of the Dolgyal spirit (Shugden) became popular within certain segments of Tibetan society and has also spread abroad. For many years now, I have steadfastly

discouraged people from doing this practice for three principal reasons.

First, as Buddhists, our ultimate refuge is in the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha. Our aim is to penetrate the meaning of the four truths and the two truths and to generate compassion and bodhicitta, all of which are included in the extensive and profound teachings given by our Teacher, the Buddha. Because Shugden is a worldly spirit, propitiating him degenerates the Buddhadharma and makes it a form of spirit worship.

Second, religious tolerance is important within the Tibetan community and among all faiths, and for years I have advocated mutual respect among the various Tibetan Buddhist traditions. I myself do practices from all four traditions — Gelug, Nyingma, Kagyü, and Sakya — and encourage others to do so as well. The practice of Shugden is very sectarian and includes threatening those who practice in a nonsectarian manner. As such, it creates divisiveness among the various Tibetan traditions.

Lastly, from the time of the Fifth Dalai Lama in the seventeenth century until the present, the Dolgyal spirit has been antagonistic to the Dalai Lamas and the Tibetan government they head. The propitiation of Shugden has been controversial in both the Sakya and Gelug traditions. Many great Tibetan lamas, including the Fifth Dalai Lama and the Thirteenth Dalai Lama, have stated the harmful effects of this practice and advised against it. At this crucial juncture in Tibetan history, we Tibetans must remain unified in support of a representative government.[31]

Leaving spirits aside, what, then, is the proper way for a sincere practitioner to relate to worldly Dharma protectors? I believe this depends on the culture and the disposition of the individual. Let's say we are initiating an important project that will benefit people. We work with total dedication and sincerity and exert effort to gather the necessary material facilities. But at some point we find we need others' help. In that case, we can request assistance or inspiration from the Dharma protectors. Some people may have a stronger karmic connection with one protector than another, just as we form friendships more easily with one person than with

another. Still, we are aware that we are responsible for creating the causes for success, both temporal and spiritual.

We must always remember that Dharma practice occurs in our mind. We may go to a temple to meditate, but Dharma practice is not limited to that place. When common people think about Tibetan Buddhism, the picture of a Tibetan monastery with monks wearing hats, playing drums, and chanting in deep voices comes to mind. These external scenes and implements are not Buddhism. Real practice means confronting our own selfishness and cultivating a heart seeking to benefit others. Taking initiations and doing the practices of various deities is a technique to help us develop our inner qualities. If we see these deities as external beings and worship them as omnipotent gods, we have gone beyond the path the Buddha taught.

Building temples and making statues is wonderful; they remind us of the Buddha. But statues cannot speak, and engaging with the Buddha's teachings is most important. We need to listen to and meditate on the teachings; we need to study and compare Pāli, Tibetan, and Chinese canons and translate texts that haven't been translated from the other canons. If we requested Nāgārjuna now for teachings, he would say, "I already wrote a lot, but you aren't studying, reflecting, and meditating on it. So there's no need for me to write more right now."

Bodhisattvas' Refuge

In the *Inquiry of Ugra Sūtra* the Buddha gives guidelines for how bodhisattvas and those aspiring to be bodhisattvas safeguard and cultivate their refuge. This is by engaging in four specific activities in relation to each of the Three Jewels:

A bodhisattva who takes refuge in the Buddha (1) does not abandon bodhicitta, (2) does not break her promise to attain full awakening, (3) does not relinquish great compassion, and (4) does not concern herself with other vehicles.

A bodhisattva who takes refuge in the Dharma (1) relies on and associates with Dharma teachers and, having respect for them

and having paid homage to them, listens to the Dharma, (2) having heard the Dharma, reflects on it deeply, (3) teaches and explains what he has heard and reflected on to others, and (4) dedicates the roots of virtue arising from giving the Dharma to other sentient beings so that they may attain full awakening.

A bodhisattva who takes refuge in the Saṅgha (1) leads those who have not yet definitively entered the Śrāvaka Vehicle to generate bodhicitta, (2) guides those who are drawn to materialism and consumerism to take interest in the Dharma, (3) relies on the Saṅgha of ārya bodhisattvas, and (4) strives to cultivate the śrāvakas' excellent qualities, but not for the purpose of attaining personal peace.

These guidelines remind those of us who aspire to be bodhisattvas to be mindful and incorporate refuge and bodhicitta into all actions. Although these twelve points take little space when written down, living them requires an open mind and great joyous effort.

4 | The Higher Training in Ethical Conduct

THE THREE HIGHER trainings in ethical conduct, concentration, and wisdom are essential elements of the path to liberation and full awakening. The true path described in the context of the four truths centers on the eightfold path of the āryas, and these eight are subsumed in the three higher trainings. The Fundamental Vehicle, Perfection Vehicle, and Vajra Vehicle are based on a common meaning of the three higher trainings, with the latter two vehicles adding unique elements to each training.

The Three Higher Trainings

There are two thoughts about when Śākyamuni attained buddhahood. According to the Pāli tradition and the Vaibhāṣika and Sautrāntika tenet systems, he was born as a prince in the Śākya clan and, having renounced worldly life, lived as a renunciant and attained awakening under the bodhi tree at Bodh Gaya. According to the Cittamātra and Madhyamaka tenet systems, he had attained awakening many eons prior and in the life as Śākyamuni displayed the behavior of practicing the path and attaining awakening.

The Sanskrit tradition follows the latter view, explaining that the Buddha's display of newly attaining awakening was skillful means so that practitioners would understand how to follow the steps of the path and become awakened themselves. No matter which version we believe, the Buddha's life is definitely an example for us to follow.

The Buddha attained awakening by practicing step-by-step. While meditating under the bodhi tree, he gained the wisdom that broke through saṃsāra and led to nirvāṇa. He cultivated this wisdom based on having attained deep states of concentration while meditating for six years with five ascetic companions. He

developed concentration based on abiding in ethical conduct by leaving the householder's life and becoming a renunciate. Here in the Buddha's life, the three higher trainings shine as a beacon on the path.

Most spiritual paths contain some practice in ethical conduct, concentration, and wisdom, but as followers of the Buddha, we refer to ours as the three *higher* trainings. These practices are higher in three ways. They are done with refuge in the Three Jewels, indicating they are higher than those of non-Buddhists. They are infused with the understanding of selflessness, showing that they lead to the higher aim of eradicating ignorance. They are done with the aspiration for liberation or full awakening, making them higher than doing them to attain a fortunate rebirth.

People who seek a fortunate rebirth in the desire realm also practice ethical conduct, and meditators who seek rebirth in the form and formless realms attain concentration without cultivating wisdom. The motivation to attain liberation or full awakening is necessary to practice all three higher trainings so that they will bring those supramundane results.

Ānanda affirmed that the Buddha continuously emphasized the importance of the three higher trainings (DN 10.1.6):

> Subha, there are three divisions of things which the Lord praised, and with which he aroused, exhorted, and established people. Which three? The division of ariyan ethical conduct, the division of ariyan concentration, and the division of ariyan wisdom.

The Importance of Ethical Conduct

People who are serious about religious practice differ from those who are not. Buddhists accept that human life has a deeper purpose than sensual enjoyments, wealth, power, social status, and praise gained in this life, and that a fortunate rebirth, liberation, and awakening are valuable in the long term. Since afflictions prevent us from actualizing our spiritual purpose, we want to reduce and eventually eliminate them. The various levels of ethical codes guide

us to subdue our physical, verbal, and mental actions. Here "ethical code" refers to a set of precepts taken in the presence of a spiritual mentor, and "precepts" refers to the particular trainings set out in that ethical code.

The meaning of mental advancement is that untamed states of mind decrease and beneficial states increase. For obscurations to be removed from the root by the wisdom realizing emptiness, our mind must first be capable of meditating with single-pointed concentration. To subdue the subtle internal distractions that interfere with concentration, firm mindfulness and introspective awareness are necessary. To strengthen our mindfulness (*smṛti*, *sati*) and introspective awareness (*saṃprajanya*, *sampajañña*) and to gain concentration, we must first overcome the grosser external distractions by developing mindfulness and introspective awareness of our physical and verbal actions. This is done through the practice of ethical conduct.

Ethical conduct means to refrain from doing harm. It applies to both monastics and lay followers because all of us need to refrain from harming ourselves and others in order to progress on the path and to create peace in the lives of those around us. To this effect, the Buddha advised us to abandon the ten destructive paths of action. Taking and keeping the various levels of ethical codes aids us in doing this and points out even subtler nonvirtuous actions to avoid. Tibetan Buddhism contains three levels of ethical codes: prātimokṣa or individual liberation, bodhisattva, and tantric. The prātimokṣa ethical codes focus on abandoning doing harm through body and speech. The bodhisattva ethical code emphasizes abandoning self-centeredness and regulates our mental activities as well as physical and verbal activities. The tantric ethical code helps overcome subtle obscurations, another form of harmful mental activity. Because their focus is more and more subtle, the three sets of ethical precepts are taken in that order: first prātimokṣa, then bodhisattva, and finally tantric.

Whether we principally practice the Fundamental Vehicle, Pāramitāyāna, or Vajrayāna, ethical conduct is the foundation of the practice. Precepts give form and focus to ethical conduct. Although all Buddhists try to live ethically and abandon the ten

nonvirtues, the taking of precepts involves special commitment and thus brings special benefit. Living in precepts makes us more aware of our physical, verbal, and mental activities. It enables us to purify destructive karma quickly because by stopping habitual negative actions, we stop their most harmful result, the tendency to do them again. It also brings a rapid and strong accumulation of merit, for every moment that we are not breaking a precept, we are actively abandoning that destructive action and thus enriching our mind with merit from acting constructively. Keeping precepts is also a wonderful contribution to world peace. Imagine if every sentient being followed the first precept, not to kill, for just one day. How different life in our world would be!

Keeping the precepts we have taken is the best sign of being a holy being. If we want to do a meditation retreat but ignore ethical conduct in our daily lives, our priorities are confused. The foundation of any practice, especially Vajrayāna, is ethical conduct. Without keeping the commitments and precepts we have taken, attaining realization is impossible. Thinking otherwise is a result of not understanding the essence of Dharma practice. We shouldn't cheat ourselves by ignoring ethical living.

Although precepts have such benefits, a person has to feel comfortable taking them and be prepared to assume the responsibility of following them as best as possible. Some people are brave when it comes to taking precepts and commitments — thinking it is their right — but cowardly when it comes to keeping them. We should be the opposite and think well before taking precepts. Then we humbly request to receive them from our teachers and with joy keep them properly.

The Prātimokṣa Ethical Code

Within the first level of ethical codes, the prātimokṣa, there are eight types: three are for householders and five for monastics. The three for lay followers are (1–2) the five precepts for male and female lay followers (*upāsaka* and *upāsikā*), and (3) the one-day precepts for lay followers (*upavāsa*). All of these are taken on the basis of having taken refuge in the Three Jewels.

The five lay precepts are to abandon killing, stealing, unwise and unkind sexual behavior, lying, and taking intoxicants (alcohol, illegal drugs, and misuse of prescription medicines). At the time of formally taking refuge in a ceremony, you can also take one or more of the five precepts.

The eight one-day precepts are the above five — the third precept being celibacy — plus to abandon (6) sitting on high or luxurious seats or beds; (7) singing, dancing, or playing music (entertainment); wearing perfumes, ornaments, or cosmetics; and (8) eating at improper times — that is, between midday and dawn of the following morning. In ancient times, people went to their local monastery on new- and full-moon days to take these precepts and practice with the monastics. Nowadays many people receive the transmission for the one-day precepts from their teacher and subsequently take them at home before a Buddha image. Some monasteries ask monastic aspirants to reside in the monastery and take the eight precepts for a period of time (many months or a year) before receiving monastic ordination. Some lay followers take the eight precepts and live at home.

The five ethical codes for monastics are for (1) fully ordained monks (*bhikṣu*, *bhikkhu*), (2) fully ordained nuns (*bhikṣuṇī*, *bhikkhunī*), (3) training nuns (*śikṣamāṇā*, *sikkhamānā*), (4) novice monks (*śrāmaṇera*, *sāmaṇera*), and (5) novice nuns (*śrāmaṇerī*, *sāmaṇerī*). Monastic aspirants begin with taking the five lay precepts. When both they and their spiritual mentor think they are ready to assume more precepts, aspirants request and then take the novice ordination. This ethical code has ten precepts: the eight as above, including celibacy, plus not handling money or precious substances. The seventh precept is divided in two: one to abandon entertainment such as music, dancing, and singing, the other to abandon wearing perfumes, ornaments, or cosmetics. In Mūlasarvāstivāda, novices receive ten precepts and must abandon three degenerations: (1) failure to formally request the abbot to be your abbot, (2) failure to abandon the signs of a lay person, (3) failure to uphold the signs of a monastic (such as wearing robes and shaving the head). In Tibetan Buddhism, the ten novice precepts have been further divided to make thirty-six.

Nuns also have a two-year training ordination that involves six, twelve, or eighteen precepts, depending on the Vinaya tradition. Bhikṣus and bhikṣuṇīs have the full ordination, with many more precepts. While the number of precepts may vary, in substance and meaning, these Vinaya traditions are very similar.[32]

The bhikṣu and bhikṣuṇī ethical codes were not present during the first twelve years of the Buddha's teaching. When monks began to misbehave, doing naturally negative actions or engaging in rude or unbecoming behavior, the Buddha established precepts. The Vinaya contains stories describing the origin of each precept and the adaptations and exceptions that the Buddha made as new circumstances arose. We see that the precepts are not rigid vows or laws but are trainings and guidelines that help us. Bhikṣuṇīs assumed almost all the precepts that were established in response to the naughty behavior of bhikṣus, in addition to ones established as a consequence of the naughty behavior of bhikṣuṇīs. The bhikṣus did not assume the precepts established for the bhikṣuṇīs. For that reason, bhikṣuṇīs have more precepts.

Number of Bhikṣu and Bhikṣuṇī Precepts according to the Three Vinaya Traditions

VINAYA	BHIKṢU PRECEPTS	BHIKṢUṆĪ PRECEPTS
Theravāda	227	311
Dharmaguptaka	250	348
Mūlasarvāstivāda	253	364

Many levels of the prātimokṣa ethical code exist because people have different levels of ability. For those capable of remaining celibate for the duration of their lives, monastic precepts are suitable. For those who are not interested in or not able to be celibate, taking some or all of the five lay precepts is appropriate. For those who are uncertain if they can keep the five precepts for their entire life and those who want to expand their ethical conduct, taking the eight precepts for one or more days is worthwhile.

As the Buddha's life story shows, when Śākyamuni saw a sick person, an old person, and a corpse, he reflected that worldly life has no essence. He then saw a religious mendicant and was inspired to engage in spiritual practice to be free from cyclic existence. For that reason, he left the householder's life and became a monastic. Similarly, as his followers, we generate the actual aspiration to attain liberation, and to that end follow the prātimokṣa ethical code of either a householder or a monastic. We choose to take precepts because we know that following them will help us purify negativities, accumulate merit, and reduce the afflictions that impede liberation.

A base motivation to become a monastic — such as wishing to escape debts, avoid caring for sick or elderly relatives, or not be responsible for children after a divorce — will not do. Neither is wanting a place to live or free food a suitable motivation. Our motivation must be to free ourselves from saṃsāra or to become a buddha in order to best benefit others.

The prātimokṣa precepts concern abandoning harmful actions of body and speech. To do so, we need to restrain the source of these actions, the mind. Some people mistakenly think that purity in ethical conduct involves changing their external behavior to conform to the rules and win others' approval. However, genuine ethical discipline involves subduing the mind, which motivates the physical and verbal behavior.

In countries following the Pāli tradition, laypeople are encouraged to become familiar with the monastic precepts so that they know how to behave in relation to monastics. In Thailand many lay followers know the monastic precepts because there is the custom of young men becoming bhikṣus for three months. In other Theravāda countries, those who have not taken the precepts are often able to read and study them. The belief is that when laypeople know the monastic precepts, they will better understand how to help monastics keep their precepts. In addition, if some monastics are naughty, laypeople will comment, which inspires the Saṅgha to behave properly.

In Central and East Asian countries, people are generally not allowed to study the prātimokṣa precepts before receiving them in a

valid ordination. Perhaps this is to avoid prospective monastic candidates from being discouraged when learning the number of precepts or to avoid laypeople disrespecting the Saṅgha if they see a few monastics who do not keep all the precepts well. However, individual teachers will sometimes allow aspirants to learn the precepts under their guidance. In Taiwan, novices learn what bhikṣus and bhikṣuṇīs are to practice and to abandon by living with them and observing them. Almost all monastics attend a Buddhist Institute for five years after ordination, where they learn the Vinaya and Dharma.

Tibetan monks usually receive a detailed explanation of the precepts when studying the Vinaya, which is one of the five main topics studied in the large monasteries. Just after ordination, monks and nuns often receive teachings on the four main precepts and the other categories of precepts. They are also referred to books where the precepts are concisely explained. Because the full ordination for women is not extant in Tibetan Buddhism, nuns can learn the novice precepts but cannot study the full Vinaya.

Furthermore, in all Vinaya traditions, only fully ordained monastics can recite the prātimokṣa precepts together at the fortnightly confession and restoration of precepts (*poṣadha*); those who are not fully ordained may not attend.

Vinaya Schools

At present, three Vinaya lineages are extant as living traditions that give monastic ordination and have monasteries where the Saṅgha lives. All three stem from the original eighteen schools that predated the historical rise of the Mahāyāna. As such, all Vinaya schools are included in the Fundamental Vehicle; there is no separate Mahāyāna Vinaya ordination, although many people who practice the Mahāyāna become monastics. The three living Vinaya traditions are:

1. The Theravāda (Sthaviravāda, T. *gnas brtan pa*, C. *shangzuo-bu*), found predominantly in South and Southeast Asia. Descended from the Vinaya lineage

brought to Sri Lanka by Aśoka's daughter and son in the third century BCE, its Vinaya literature is in Pāli.

2. The Dharmaguptaka (T. *chos sbas pa*, C. *fazang-bu*) Vinaya was translated into Chinese in 410–12 by Buddhayaśas, and in 709 the emperor decreed that it was to be the only Vinaya followed in China. It is also called the "Four-Part Vinaya" and is followed principally in China, Korea, and Vietnam.

3. The Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya (T. *gzhi thams cad yod par smra ba*, C. *genben shuoyiqieyou-bu*), followed in Tibet, Mongolia, and the Himalayan regions. It was brought to Tibet by the Nālandā master Śāntarakṣita.

Considering that the literature of these Vinaya schools was passed down orally for many centuries before being written down, and considering the geographical distance between them — from Sri Lanka and Indonesia in the south to Gandhara and Kashmir in the west, to Tibet and Mongolia in the north, and to China, Korea, and Japan in the East — these schools are remarkably similar in their presentation of the monastic lifestyle. They follow essentially the same precepts and perform the same Saṅgha procedures and rites (*saṅghakarman*). The layouts and contents of the three Vinayas are also similar.

The three Vinaya traditions each rely on their own Vinaya commentaries. Buddhaghosa wrote an authoritative commentary, the *Samantapāsādikā*, on the Theravāda pāṭimokkha in the fifth century. To do this, he relied heavily on very old commentaries written at the Mahāvihāra Monastery in Sri Lanka. Several other Vinaya commentaries were written after this as well.

Five important Vinaya commentaries were translated into Chinese, and many commentaries were written in Chinese. Daoxuan (596–667) was the most famous and prolific commentator, authoring the *Three Books of Nanshan* (*Nanshan San Da Bu*) and other Vinaya materials that have been studied up to the present. Using the Dharmaguptaka Vinaya as the basis, he compared it with the other Vinayas extant in the Chinese canon — the Sarvāstivāda, Mahāsāṃghika, Mahīśāsaka, and

Mūlasarvāstivāda — and drew all the good points together in his works. Chinese monastics take advantage of there being four other Vinayas in their canon and consult them when the Dharmaguptaka Vinaya does not give sufficient detail on a point of interest.

Tibetans follow the Vinaya commentaries of the Indian masters Guṇaprabha and Śākyaprabha. Guṇaprabha studied sūtras, Vinaya, and commentaries under the guidance of Vasubandhu, and he specialized in the Sarvāstivāda Vinaya. His commentaries, the *Vinaya Sūtra* and *Ekottarakarmaśataka*, are used to study the monastic code. We also follow the Tibetan subcommentaries by Sherab Sangpo, *Ocean of* [*Vinaya*] *Scriptural References* (*dul ba mdo rtsa'i rnam bshad nyi ma'i' od zer legs bshad lung gi rgya mtsho*), and Gyalwa Gendun Drub's *Precious Garland* [*of Vinaya*] (*bslab bya rin chen phreng ba*).

The Benefits of Practicing the Prātimokṣa Ethical Conduct

The practice of Vinaya — the monastic code — helps to increase contentment. Monastics are limited in the food they can consume — no solid food is taken from midday until early dawn the next morning. Monastics do not have the right to demand this or that food; whatever they receive, they must accept. Monastics in East Asia who also follow the bodhisattva ethical code are vegetarian; Tibetan monastics who also follow the bodhisattva ethical code may or may not be vegetarian.

How does this practice of having limits create contentment? Contentment is an internal feeling that arises when craving is absent. As we practice releasing our craving and being satisfied with the present situation, contentment naturally arises. From our own experience we learn that contentment comes not from having all our desires fulfilled but from freeing ourselves from being under the control of those desires.

Monastics also have limits regarding their clothing. We cannot keep more than one set of robes with the thought, "this is mine." Extra robes must be regarded as belongings shared with another

monastic. We also cannot wear expensive robes. Previously in Tibet some monks wore luxurious robes. This was self-deception. The Chinese Communists were kind to us, liberating us from this corruption. Both the Vinaya and the Communists helped us to be content with the clothes we had!

Monastics limit the time spent with family to avoid being emotionally dependent on them and getting involved in family dramas. Family activities consume much time and take us away from Dharma study and practice. Adopting the name our preceptor gave us at the time of ordination signifies leaving our old identity as relatives or friends of others and beginning a new life as a monastic.

Practicing Vinaya helps us to develop mindfulness and introspective awareness. By being mindful of our precepts and checking if our behavior is proper when we are awake — whether we are walking, sitting, standing, or lying down — our mindfulness becomes stronger. Well-trained monastics can catch themselves and abstain from negative actions even in a dream.

The practice of Vinaya also helps to develop fortitude (patience) and tolerance. The *Prātimokṣa Sūtra* says (DV 43):

> Fortitude is the first and foremost path.
>
> The Buddha regards this as supreme in his teachings;
>
> one who has left the household life yet annoys others
>
> is not called a renunciate.

The Buddha taught that fortitude leads not only to the ultimate happiness of nirvāṇa but also to happiness in this very life. In this regard, he taught four means of refining virtue. Although he taught that practicing these four is the way to become a genuine monastic, they refine the virtue of everyone who practices them. They also bring harmony to our relationships and to society in general.

> If others are angry with you, do not react with anger but with fortitude.
>
> If others hit you, do not attack them back.
>
> If others criticize you, do not criticize them in return.

> If others embarrass or insult you, do not respond by embarrassing or insulting them.

These are real ascetic practices that will increase our fortitude. I tell people that the essence of the Buddha's teachings can be put in two sentences: When possible, help others. When that is not possible, at least don't harm them. These four means of practicing fortitude embody that principle.

People who grew up in a theistic religion and later became Buddhist may think of precepts as nonnegotiable rules propounded by an authority. Naturally, this makes them uncomfortable. Two types of rules exist. One is the troublesome kind — those that are only rhetoric and lack a constructive purpose. The other consists of helpful guidelines that lead to happy results. For example, if we want to be healthy, we voluntarily adopt new eating habits and avoid activities and foods that cause illness. Similarly, when we want to abandon the mental disease of ignorance, anger, and attachment, we voluntarily curtail the actions motivated by them and the objects that trigger them. We undertake the precepts voluntarily because they help us live according to our values and attain our spiritual aims; they are not forced on us by an external authority.

The form an ethical code takes and the behavior it encompasses may vary according to the culture in which it exists. To give an analogy, if we are overweight, we need to reduce our food intake. But if we become too thin and weak, we need to eat more. Although the two guidelines are opposite to each other, the purpose of good health is the same.

Similarly, the monastic precepts were established in ancient Indian culture, an agrarian society where it was difficult to find cloth, women were cloistered in their homes, and going on alms rounds was societally acceptable and even seen as virtuous. Contemporary society is very different. There are cars, digital devices, and the Internet — items that are not regulated in the Vinaya. Women are educated, many families have only one parent, and people work long hours and have limited free time. Some monastics choose to keep the precepts exactly as written in the Vinaya, and that is commendable. However, because of the changes

in society, I believe the way we keep some of the precepts needs to be adjusted. We must look at the Buddha's intention in establishing each precept: What mental state is that precept designed to subdue? If societal conditions are not suitable to keep a particular precept literally, how can we implement the meaning of that precept in our lives?

At the first council after the Buddha's parinirvāṇa, the question arose of changing the precepts, since the Buddha had said that minor precepts could be changed when circumstances necessitated it. But no one asked what the minor precepts were, so the council of five hundred arhats decided not to change any precepts. Yet the Buddha's injunction to abandon actions that are in line with those he said to abandon and to do actions concordant with those he prescribed remains. Monasteries have thus developed their own internal rules and guidelines to match present conditions. For example, had digital devices, television, and the Internet existed in his time, the Buddha surely would have established many precepts regarding them. If climate change had been an issue twenty-five centuries ago, he would have established precepts to limit monastics' carbon imprint and to require recycling.

Important elements of the Vinaya should not be changed, and when internal guidelines and rules are established in a monastery, care must be taken not to go against the original intention of the Buddha. The Vinaya precepts should be maintained well. Although people may interpret them differently, only an assembly of monastic elders from all Buddhist traditions has the authority to change any of them.

If Buddha came today, he certainly would modify some areas of the Vinaya and establish new precepts according to contemporary social reality. However, this is not a matter that one individual can decide. Since the Vinaya is common to most Buddhist countries, the issue of reform and modification needs to be discussed by individual monastics of all traditions. By everyone conducting thorough research in their own traditions and examining the general rules as well as the exceptions to them, we could determine what modifications are necessary and permissible given the cultural

context of modern times. These are matters that require serious thought.

The prātimokṣa ethical codes are a common element in the śrāvaka and bodhisattva paths. Bodhisattvas, whether they practice the Pāramitāyāna or Vajrayāna, must respect the prātimokṣa ethical codes. Thinking they are inferior or irrelevant is a transgression of the bodhisattva and tantric ethical code. The thirteenth root bodhisattva precept is "abandon causing others to discard completely their prātimokṣa ethical code and embrace the Mahāyāna." Being negligent of one's prātimokṣa precepts is explicitly forbidden in the bodhisattva and tantric precepts.

Bodhisattvas must set a good example for others and inspire their faith; otherwise they will not be able to benefit sentient beings. The ninth auxiliary bodhisattva precept is to abandon "not acting according to one's vowed trainings when it would generate or sustain faith in others," the fifteenth is to avoid "not abandoning negative actions that cause one to have a bad reputation," and the sixteenth is to abandon "not correcting one's own deluded actions or not helping others to correct theirs." The second root tantric precept is to abandon "contemptuously disregarding the (prātimokṣa) trainings and precepts," and the tantric pledges, recited daily in the Six Session Guru Yoga, include "I shall abandon the four roots, intoxicants, and unsuitable activities" and "maintain the ten virtues." An auxiliary tantric commitment is to abandon "needlessly going beyond the prātimokṣa or bodhisattva precepts." Assuming higher ethical codes necessitates that we become even more diligent in keeping our prātimokṣa precepts.

REFLECTION

1. Ask yourself: How many years have passed since I was born? How many years do I have left? How many months? How many days? See that your precious human life is slipping away and that while you still have this life, it's important not to take it for granted but to use it wisely.
2. Recall that all the suffering people experience in saṃsāra comes from destructive actions and recollect the disadvantages of these unwholesome deeds.
3. Since happiness arises from virtuous karma, make a sincere determination to abandon negativity and create virtue.

4. Since this begins with practicing ethical conduct, see the importance of taking and living in precepts.

Intoxicants

The precept concerning intoxicants calls for special attention, since intoxicants are prevalent in most societies and cause much damage. Despite the material prosperity and wealth of developed countries, many people there are lonely, unhappy, and suffer from stress and low self-esteem. Knowing that external things do not bring happiness, but not knowing how to find inner happiness, they turn to illegal drugs and alcohol, and abuse prescription drugs as well. Misusing these substances is a clear sign of unhappiness and the failure of consumer society to solve humanity's problems. Of course, intoxicants do not solve these problems either and in fact exacerbate them, ruining people's lives, families, careers, and friendships.

It is in this light that the Buddha warned us to avoid intoxicants. His motivation was to protect us from the suffering that comes from the lack of restraint of an intoxicated mind. One story tells of a monk who was held captive and told that he must either kill a sheep, have sex with a woman, steal another's possessions, lie, or take an intoxicant. Thinking that consuming intoxicants was not a naturally negative action, whereas the others were, he chose that. However, once he was intoxicated, he did the other four actions! In a similar vein, I (Chodron) work with prison inmates, and 99 percent of them were intoxicated at the time they committed their crime. Of course, that doesn't excuse harmful behavior, but it demonstrates that although they didn't plan on harming others when initially taking the intoxicant, the intoxicant destroyed their awareness of the consequences of their actions until it was too late.

The Buddha took a clear stand in relation to intoxicants: "Anyone who calls me their teacher and claims to be my follower will not drink alcohol, not even the amount on the tip of a blade of grass." You may wonder why, then, when giving the five precepts to crowds of thousands of people, I sometimes tell the story of my

teacher, Kyabje Ling Rinpoche. When lay Buddhists protested that they found abandoning *chang* — a Tibetan beverage made of fermented barley — too difficult, he told them, "at least drink less and don't get drunk." However, when giving the lay precepts in the context of the Kālacakra empowerment or when the audience consists of more dedicated practitioners, I stick to the Buddha's clear stance of abandoning all intoxicants whatsoever.

Why Celibacy?

The precept to be responsible in our sexual behavior and to abandon unwise and unkind forms of sexual behavior is common to all Buddhist traditions. The Buddha was not against sexuality but recognized that it was a powerful energy that practitioners with different spiritual aspirations and different levels of practice had to deal with differently.

On the first level of Buddhist practice, one works within human nature, which comes from having this body in cyclic existence. Here the emphasis is on subduing gross levels of afflictions that motivate harmful actions and avoiding the ten nonvirtues that actively harm others. At this level, one is encouraged to subdue extreme sexual lust and to abandon unwise or unkind sexual behavior that causes pain and confusion for oneself and others. Proper use of one's sexuality is appropriate for lay practitioners; celibacy is not necessary. Enjoying sensual pleasures is part of your life, and Buddhism simply recommends being practical and not getting so carried away with sensual pleasures that you harm others or create heavy destructive karma.

In that light, Thich Nhat Hanh, a renowned Vietnamese monk who teaches in the West, considers sexual activity without love and commitment to be unwise sexual behavior. Although this is not explicitly mentioned in the scriptures, I think it is true. Having love for one's partner and a sense of responsibility and involvement with him or her is important. Then the relationship will last for a long time, which in general is helpful for children to prosper.

People have so many problems in their romantic relationships and are tormented by the emotional, financial, and social problems that broken relationships bring. For this reason, I advise people to build strong relationships over time and not to rush into marriage. You must examine false expectations you may hold: for example, thinking that the other person will meet all your needs or believing that since love conquers all, you do not need to work at building a good relationship or communicating well with your partner.

On the second level of practice, we no longer seek the pleasures of saṃsāra. We see saṃsāra as a type of bondage that we seek to be free of. Attachment is one of the principal causes of saṃsāra, and gaining freedom from attachment — especially to objects of the five senses — is a desirable result on the path to liberation. Of all forms of attachment, sexual relations is the most intense and complex because it involves attachment to objects of all five senses — sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and touch. Thus those who seek freedom from attachment are advised to subdue sexual desire and refrain from sexual activity. This advice comes from the Buddha and is found in the scriptures.

At this point on the path, we have to confront things that are normally considered a part of human nature, such as sexual desire. Our aim now is not having a career and raising a family, but to attain liberation, and attachment to sexual intercourse prevents fulfilling our spiritual aim. Although sexual desire arises naturally from our body, we can control it and change it. On this second level of practice we go against human nature — which includes our biologically conditioned attitudes and impulses that come from having a body and mind under the influence of afflictions and karma. As our aim is now liberation, monastic ordination, with its requirement of strict celibacy, becomes important.

An example is helpful. Skilled athletes who hold high aspirations eagerly abandon activities that impede their training and the realization of their goals. To be successful, they willingly refrain from eating certain foods, taking intoxicants, and irregular sleeping habits. They give up a grand social life and spend their time in consistent training. Their restraint is not seen as unhealthy suppression but as necessary and conducive circumstances that will

lead them to fully develop their potential and achieve their goals. Similarly, monastics willingly give up sexual relations and immersion in sensual pleasures because these hinder the attainment of their spiritual goals. Those activities are time consuming, and monastics prefer to use their time in Dharma activities.

Buddhism speaks of two types of desire. One is based on reason and is beneficial, such as the desire to help those in need or the desire to attain liberation. Another is based on wrong conceptions and is more emotional. This negative type of desire craves for sense pleasures but is never satisfied by obtaining the object of desire. Whatever pleasure we experience leads to craving more or better. Such craving can only be satisfied by gaining freedom from desire.

Western psychology has various views on sexuality and what constitutes a healthy relationship to sexuality at various stages of life. Although Western psychology is very sophisticated, it operates within fixed parameters and with certain assumptions about human nature and happiness that differ from those of Buddhism. If we described suffering, its origins, liberation, and the path from the perspective of psychology, it would differ considerably from the four truths in Buddhism.

In youth, people may have different sexual experiences, including masturbation, but those who choose to become monastics stop all of these. As a result, their health and mental stability often improve. Although following sexual desire can bring temporary satisfaction, those seeking liberation and awakening need to control and redirect this energy. This is emphasized in the *Kālacakra Tantra* and other tantras. Those monastics who can control their experiences even in dreams are truly remarkable.

If liberation from the acute fears and pain of saṃsāra did not exist, then we could go along with human nature and do whatever we like. However, since it is possible to achieve awakening, the purest form of mind, then taking action that seems to be contrary to human nature is worthwhile and leads to supramundane results.

Many factors need to be considered and understood when an individual considers how or whether to use his or her sexuality. The

Buddha did not say that everyone must give up sexual activity. It is our own choice.

REFLECTION

1. What ethical values do you live by?
2. Did you accept them because you learned them from others when you were young? Because you examined them and saw the reasons behind them? Both?
3. Why did the Buddha caution against taking intoxicants? Does your experience and what you have observed about others' experience with intoxicants support this?

Bodhisattva and Tantric Ethical Codes

The bodhisattva ethical code is part of Mahāyāna practice and is taken with the wish to attain awakening in order to benefit all sentient beings. In Tibetan Buddhism, the bodhisattva ethical code contains eighteen root precepts and forty-six auxiliary ones. In Chinese Buddhism, the bodhisattva ethical code for monastics has ten root precepts and forty-eight auxiliary ones, whereas the bodhisattva ethical code for laypeople has six root and twenty-eight auxiliary precepts. No matter how they are enumerated, all these precepts focus on subduing self-centeredness, which is the main obstacle to generating bodhicitta and engaging in the bodhisattvas' deeds.

The tantric ethical code found in Vajrayāna Buddhism is undertaken with a more intense bodhicitta motivation — wishing to attain awakening very quickly in order to be capable of benefiting sentient beings sooner. Bodhisattva precepts and tantric precepts emphasize ethical conduct predominantly on the mental level, although certain behaviors are also regulated. Here, motivation and attitude are foremost. Based on this, some scriptures mention that all actions can become Dharma actions; that is, if our motivation is pure and sincere, we can turn all actions into Dharma actions. However, this does not imply an exceptional

ethical perspective whereby everything a person does can indiscriminately be seen as virtuous.

According to the Vinaya, where the main emphasis of the practice is on decreasing attachment, monastics are not allowed to touch money, gold, or other precious objects. However, according to the bodhisattva precepts, which presupposes some degree of control over attachment and emphasizes the welfare of others, if the donor would be hurt or feel deprived of the opportunity to create merit if we refused her monetary gift, then we should accept it. Although these actions may superficially seem contradictory, they both involve ethical precepts that apply to one person at different times in her training, according to what she is capable of at the time.

Tantric texts discuss certain behaviors that reflect a person's having overcome polarities and preconceptions regarding such things as cleanliness or beauty. The conduct of very advanced tantric practitioners may reflect this. It is often said that their behavior cannot be spoken of in terms of precepts because their level of spiritual realizations is beyond the preconceptions of inherent good and evil. We must properly understand what this means. Such people are no longer under the influence of ignorance and other afflictions; it is in that sense that they are beyond good and evil. It does not mean that they may transgress precepts at will, with no harmful results. Rather, because they have profound wisdom of ultimate reality, their minds are so thoroughly disciplined that the very purpose of precepts — to tame the unruly mind — has already been fulfilled. Having understood emptiness and dependent arising, they have great respect for ethical conduct. Although such practitioners may act unconventionally on occasion and outwardly appear to be acting contrary to precepts, no mental defilement is involved, and their actions do not harm others.

For practitioners who are not at that level — and that includes the great majority of us — we need to keep our precepts with mindfulness and introspective awareness to prevent the arising and the acting out of our afflictions. As long as we remain vulnerable to the afflictions and their latencies, ethical conduct is relevant and

necessary because there is danger of causing harm to ourselves and others.

Making Mistakes and Rectifying Them

We take precepts because we are imperfect beings who are trying to tame our minds. We do our best to keep the precepts purely so that we can benefit from having them. But we also know that we're not perfect and will make mistakes. If we could keep the precepts perfectly, we would not need to take them. The Buddha set up many ways whereby we can make amends when we transgress precepts, and by following these, we restore the purity of our precepts. In this way, we learn from our mistakes. However, if monastics transgress a root precept — such as killing a human being, stealing something of value, having sexual intercourse, or lying about spiritual attainments — with all factors complete, he or she is no longer a monastic and must return to lay life. Lay followers may retake the five precepts if they have broken them.

When we transgress a precept, it is important not to conceal it, but to reveal it and use the methods taught in the Vinaya to purify both the destructive karma and the infraction of the precept. There are many stories in the sūtras of people who obstinately held wrong views or refused to follow the training,[33] but later regretted their misdeeds. They went to the Buddha to reveal and confess their errors: "Venerable, a transgression overcame me, in that like a fool, confused, and blundering, I did [that behavior]. Venerable, may the Bhagavān forgive my transgression seen as such, for the sake of restraint in the future." The Buddha then agreed that the person indeed committed a transgression and spoke of the consequences of having done so because he wanted to make sure the person understood the faults of the action. When the Buddha was sure that the person comprehended this and that his confession was genuine, he said: "Since you see your transgression as such and make amends in accordance with the Dhamma, we forgive you. For it is growth in the ariya's discipline when one sees one's transgression as such and makes amends in accordance with the Dhamma by undertaking restraint in the future."

It is essential that monastics help one another by giving and receiving advice and admonishment. When a monastic misbehaves but does not acknowledge his error, individual monastics or the Saṅgha community should advise him with a compassionate motivation so that he can correct his ways. When we receive admonishment, we must listen respectfully and contemplate what those who are senior in ordination or wiser in the precepts say. After the root precepts, the second category of precepts — the remainders (*saṃghāvaśeṣa*, *saṅghādisesa*) — are the most serious to keep well. Many transgressions of the remainders are tied to defiantly refusing to heed advice and admonition.

Such behavior creates many hindrances to our practice. In some cases, the behavior a person is being warned against may not be naturally negative and thus itself would not create a big hindrance. However, when someone is defiant, stubbornly defends himself, and refuses to listen to wise advice, he creates obstacles to spiritual progress. For example, when the Buddha recommended that monastics eat only before noon, the monk Bhaddāli told the Buddha he was not willing to do that and announced to the Saṅgha as well that he refused to undertake that training (MN 65). While eating after noon is not naturally negative, Bhaddāli's attitude of clinging to his own ideas created the obstacle. Although it can sometimes be hard to listen to others when our self-centered attitude is strong, for our own benefit we should try to take in the compassionate counsel that those wiser than us offer.

Fortunately for Bhaddāli, some wise monks recommended that he apologize to the Buddha, which he did. The Buddha was stern with him in response. It made me (Chodron) wonder what would have happened had Bhaddāli tried to follow the training and then, if he experienced difficulties, had humbly gone to the Buddha to explain. Surely the Buddha would have compassionately helped, and so many problems would not have arisen.

If we keep our precepts well and take the essence of our precious human lives, our minds will transform and we will be able to accomplish much that is of benefit to ourselves and others. How is this to be done? Sāriputta recommended (MN 3.7):

> Here disciples of the Teacher who live secluded train in seclusion; they abandon what the Teacher tells them to abandon; they are not luxurious and careless; they are keen to avoid backsliding and are leaders in seclusion.

Sāriputta goes on to say the real evil is greed and hatred, anger and revenge, contempt and domination, envy and avarice, deceit and fraud, obstinacy and presumption, conceit and arrogance, vanity and negligence. In other words, "seclusion" means isolation from afflictions, destructive actions, and the eight worldly concerns. Seclusion from self-centeredness and self-grasping ignorance are best. Someone could live in seclusion in a remote place far from other living beings and still have a mind filled with negativities and distractions. Genuine seclusion entails conscientiousness, mindfulness, introspective awareness, integrity, and consideration for others. In short, seclusion is to train our minds so they become one with the Dharma.

Precepts give structure to our physical and verbal actions and stimulate us to examine our minds, for only by working with our views and emotions can we keep the prātimokṣa precepts well. However, monastic life is more than abiding in precepts. In *Precious Garland*, Nāgārjuna points out fifty-seven faults that monastics (and lay followers too!) should abandon. By noticing when they arise in our minds and knowing the antidotes to each one, we will be able to counteract them and pacify our minds. Nāgārjuna's verses and their explanation can be found in *Practical Ethics and Profound Emptiness*.[34]

REFLECTION

1. What is the reason for not concealing our ethical misdeeds and broken precepts?
2. What benefits arise from confessing and regretting our harmful actions?
3. What effect would admitting and regretting your misdeeds have on your mind? Is this something you want to do?

5 | Saṅgha: The Monastic Community

The Value of the Monastic Community

THE SAṄGHA,[35] the monastic community, has been important, respected, and valued throughout history. One reason is that its members practice the higher training in ethical conduct by taking and observing the bhikṣu or bhikṣuṇī precepts. Having a simple lifestyle, they are free from family concerns and the necessity to work to provide for a family. Having more time and energy for Dharma practice, the Saṅgha has been charged with preserving the Buddha's teaching throughout the ages. The Saṅgha upholds the transmitted Dharma by memorizing, learning, contemplating, and teaching the Buddhadharma; it upholds the realized Dharma through meditation and practice that lead to profound spiritual realizations. This is not to say that lay practitioners are incapable of these activities, and there have been great lay practitioners throughout history.

Monasteries act as the physical locations for the full-time practice and preservation of the teachings. When people think of monastics living together for the purpose of studying and practicing the Dharma, they feel inspired. Rejoicing in the monastics' serious practice of purifying their minds and cultivating good qualities, people are uplifted and feel hope for the world. Monasteries also act as physical locations where the public can go when they need spiritual comfort or teachings. They also house large libraries and Buddhist art and artifacts.

In our day and age, Saṅgha living together at monasteries provides an example of a community intent on living ethically. Not conforming to the consumer culture, they show that it's possible to be happy and content with a simple lifestyle and few possessions. Many monasteries take care to reduce, reuse, and recycle; they

compost organic material, showing the public that it does not take great effort to do one's part to care for the environment.

Some monasteries have temples of great grandeur that inspire the residents and visitors alike. How is this concordant with a simple lifestyle? It is said that ideally the monastery should be rich, but the individual monastics living there should be poor. This means that common areas — the temple, library, meeting areas, and so forth — should be attractive and inspiring, but monastic quarters, robes, and personal articles should be modest.

The Buddha indicated the importance of the Saṅgha when he was about to enter parinirvāṇa (DV 45):

> Do not say after my parinirvāṇa that pure practitioners have no protector. Now that I have taught the *Prātimokṣa Sūtra* and the excellent Vinaya well, regard these as the World-honored One after my parinirvāṇa.
>
> If this sūtra remains long in the world, the Buddhadharma will be widespread, and because it is widespread, nirvāṇa can be attained.
>
> Failure to keep the *Prātimokṣa Sūtra* and to conduct the poṣadha as it should be is like the setting of the sun, when darkness shrouds the entire world.
>
> Always protect and keep the precepts, just as a yak protects its tail. Always stay together in harmony according to the Buddha's words.

And from the dedication verses of the poṣadha (DV 46):

> The Buddha's appearance in the world is to be widely celebrated.
>
> Listening to the Dharma and practicing it accordingly is the surest cause for peace.
>
> The harmony of the assembly is the surest factor for nirvāṇa.
>
> Liberating sentient beings from suffering is the utmost happiness.

The Flourishing of the Dharma and the Existence of the Dharma

Traditionally the flourishing of Buddhism in a land is dependent on the existence of the Saṅgha. Because lay practitioners are more numerous in the West, some of my Western friends ask me if this is still the case. To answer, we must distinguish between the flourishing of the Buddha's doctrine in a place and the presence or existence of the Dharma there. According to scripture, whether a place is a "central land" where the Buddha's doctrine flourishes depends on the presence of the fourfold assembly — bhikṣus and bhikṣuṇīs (male and female fully ordained monastics) and male and female lay practitioners with five precepts. Since lay followers are numerous, the flourishing of Buddhism in a country is determined by whether the practice of the Vinaya is present there, specifically if there is a fully functioning monastic community — that is, one that conducts the three principal Vinaya rites: fortnightly confession and restoration of precepts (*poṣadha*, *uposatha*), the annual rains retreat (*varṣā*, *vassa*), and the annual invitation for correction (*pravāraṇā*, *pavāraṇā*).

The existence or presence of Buddhism in a locale depends on the existence of practitioners. If lay followers who have taken refuge in the Three Jewels and abide with the five precepts live in a place, Buddhism is present there. Thus there are very few times when Buddhism has not been present. For example, after Buddhism in Mongolia was destroyed by Communists, laypeople who had taken refuge and kept the lay precepts still lived there. Although Buddhism existed in Mongolia at that time, we can't say it flourished there or that Mongolia was a central land then.

The Intent and Purpose of Monastic Life

Stable interest in becoming a monastic develops naturally from deep reflection on the foundational Buddhist teachings. Contemplating the four truths, especially impermanence and death and the disadvantages of saṃsāra, we develop the aspiration to be free from saṃsāra. As a result of reflecting on compassion and

dependent arising, we become interested in the nature of the mind, which leads to an appreciation of emptiness. This leads to an understanding of rebirth, and then to the possibility of achieving liberation. When one is convinced of this possibility, one will naturally be drawn to living a life according to ethical precepts, which could lead to requesting ordination as a monastic. The Buddha explained the development of the motivation to ordain (MN 29.3):

> Monastics, here a clansman goes forth out of faith from the home life into homelessness considering, "I am a victim of birth, aging, and death, of sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair. I am a victim of suffering, a prey to suffering. Surely an ending of this whole mass of duḥkha can be known."

The Buddha established the monastic community for a purpose. To fight afflictions, we need the correct view of emptiness, and to maintain this view, we must develop single-pointedness of mind. To concentrate, mindfulness is needed, and this can be gained from training in ethical conduct. While many lay practitioners maintain the ethical conduct of the five precepts, the ethical conduct of monastics is stricter and thus has a greater effect to subdue the mind. Whereas the life of a householder may be more colorful, monastic life is more stable. Although it is difficult and requires giving up sexual relations and so on, there are some consolations and benefits even in this lifetime. The monastic way of life is praised not because it is inherently worthy of respect, but because it has direct relevance in aiding the development of the three higher trainings.

This latter point is important in the West, where some people may think that monasticism is outdated and irrelevant. We must remember that our teacher Śākyamuni Buddha himself was a monk. The Buddha did not live as a monk for fifty years to avoid working and to get free lunches in villages! Rather, because of the simplicity and lack of worldly activities a monastic life entails, he had more freedom to learn and meditate on the Dharma. The examples of the past great masters — the majority of whom were

monastics — should be followed by the disciples of the present and future.

Even after attaining awakening, the Buddha remained a monastic. His ethical restraint and monastic lifestyle were natural expressions of the purity of his mind. His example illustrates how a person whose mind is completely liberated from defilements lives his or her life.

Monastic life is not suitable for everyone. Someone who practices diligently can attain high realizations as a lay Buddhist. Marpa, the great master of the yogi Milarepa, was a lay practitioner and inconceivable tantric adept, as was Milarepa. Everyone must choose the lifestyle most suitable for themselves and have confidence in their ability to practice.

In Tibet, two communities of practitioner evolved: the community of those with braided hair in white dress and the community of ordained monastics in saffron (maroon) robes. The white dress refers to lay practitioners, especially those practicing Vajrayāna. They do not observe the external forms of ordained life, such as wearing monastic robes and shaving the head, but they keep precepts: the five lay precepts, the bodhisattva ethical code, and the tantric ethical code. The saffron-robed are those who are celibate and follow the monastic ethical code. They may also follow the bodhisattva and tantric ethical codes. In Tibet, each community practiced with clarity and direction.

Today we find people who are neither in one camp nor the other. The Tibetan yogi Drukpa Kunleg (1455–1529) said many people who practiced like this are now in the hell realms. If you are a monastic, you should dress and act like one. On occasion I meet people who are wearing monastic robes at one time and lay clothes at another, so even I get confused when I see them!

Sometimes we encounter laypeople who are eager to put on clothes that resemble monastic robes. This, too, is confusing for the general public, and for me too! My debate teacher, Tsenzhap Serkong Rinpoche, said we should not be like bats: in one situation, to fulfill its self-centered interests, a bat will claim to be a bird; in another situation when it is more advantageous, it will

announce, "I'm a mouse!" People should make a clear decision regarding which lifestyle they want to live, and then receive the appropriate level of precepts and wear the clothes that correspond to it.

Whichever lifestyle you follow, do it with clarity. If you decide to become a monastic, the change in your appearance should reflect a change in your mind, in your lifestyle, and in the direction of your life. If someone puts on monastic robes without having the proper motivation, he usually does not follow the precepts well. In that case, he damages himself and is in danger of polluting the Dharma. I went to Mongolia when it was a Soviet republic. In a gallery there was a painting of a huge monk with a gaping mouth and laypeople walking into it. The curator was embarrassed to tell me that the painting indicated that people were being exploited by the Saṅgha. I replied that there's no need for him to be embarrassed because in some cases this happens. Each monastic should analyze his or her motivation and actions and see if they are cultivating the Dharma or disgracing it.

Keeping monastic precepts for a long time is of great benefit. It enables people to gain strong conviction in the efficacy of the three higher trainings and habituate themselves to them over time. In their future lives, they will encounter conducive circumstances and will be able to continue practicing as a monastic. In this way, awakening will be attained more swiftly because they are habituated to releasing attachment to saṃsāra and to practicing the path.

That said, if a person no longer wishes to be a monastic, he is free to return the precepts and continue his Dharma practice as a layperson. No one is pressured to continue being a monastic if he no longer desires to be.

For those who have the strong desire to keep the precepts but have obstacles to doing so for their entire lifetime, the Thai system of permitting ordination for a limited period — usually three months — is good. However, short-term monastic ordination is not possible in the Tibetan system because all the prātimokṣa precepts, except the eight one-day precepts, must be taken with the motivation to keep them for the duration of our lives. However,

someone can take the eight one-day precepts for an extended period of time and reap the benefits of doing so.

Maintaining the Purity of the Saṅgha

In the *Sutta on the Fruits of the Homeless Life*, the Buddha describes how one becomes a monastic and then lives as one (DN 2.42):

> And having gone forth [from the householder life to the homeless life of a monastic], he dwells restrained by the restraint of the precepts, persisting in right behavior, seeing danger in the slightest faults, observing the commitments he has taken regarding body, deed, and word, devoted to the skilled and purified life, perfected in ethical conduct, with the sense-doors guarded, skilled in mindful awareness, and content.

To receive ordination precepts, a person must be motivated by renunciation — the aspiration to be free from cyclic existence and attain liberation. However, in ancient India and later in Tibet, a few people took ordination to escape punishment or danger, or as a way of receiving requisites. Of the Tibetan refugees in India today, approximately 10 percent are monastics. Of these, some are genuine practitioners and others are not. Those who are proper monastics should remain; those who misbehave or are lax should go. More emphasis on the quality rather than the quantity of monastics is necessary. One step in this direction would be to take seriously, and not just as a formality, the part of the ordination ceremony that questions whether a person has any obstacles to receiving ordination. This is my view; other Tibetan teachers may see the situation differently.

The Vinaya states that people should be properly screened and prepared before ordination and then trained in the monastic life afterward. Nevertheless, this is not the case for some monastics. As a result, the individual monastics and the general Buddhist community suffer. This situation saddens me because the existence, well-being, and good example of a well-trained monastic

community is important for lay practitioners, other monastics, and society in general.

Although it is up to each person to decide whether to become a monastic, once you are ordained, you should practice sincerely. Putting on robes and shaving one's head are not sufficient to be a monastic. If you wear the robes of a monastic but your way of life is not good, disadvantages accrue to you as well as to the Saṅgha. The Buddha declared that accepting offerings from lay followers who donate with faith but not keeping your precepts well creates powerful karma that will ripen in a hellish rebirth. He explained that there are four ways of enjoying or using requisites: enjoyment with theft, with debt, as an inheritance, and as an owner.

1. When monastics who transgress precepts and have poor conduct enjoy requisites, it is as if they were stealing the requisites because they have been offered to those who practice well. This is *enjoyment with theft*.
2. When monastics with good conduct enjoy offerings but do not reflect on the kindness, generosity, and merit of the donor and do not dedicate for the donor's welfare, it is *enjoyment with debt*. This is because they consume the requisites but have not fulfilled their commitments to the donor.
3. Ārya learners who are on their way to become arhats are those truly worthy of receiving offerings. When these āryas enjoy offerings, it is *enjoyment of an inheritance*, since it is as if they were using the inheritance that will later become theirs.
4. Arhats' use of requisites and offerings is *enjoyment as an owner*. Since they have eradicated all pollutants and fulfilled the aim of the path, the offerings are theirs to use.

If a monastic does not behave properly, the Saṅgha as a whole will face difficulties. Lay followers become disillusioned, which harms their faith in the Dharma. In addition, the lay community will lose respect and look down on monastics. To avoid this, monastics must study and practice well and make themselves into objects worthy of respect, and laypeople should respect and

support them. Some people may be surprised at my frankness, but I say these things out of love and respect for the Dharma and the Vinaya and for sentient beings.

Along this line, Atiśa gave excellent advice to monastics:[36]

> For those holding monastic ordination,
>
> the big trap lies in receiving
>
> material gifts and social respect.
>
> Avoid attachment to such things.
>
> Those free from materialistic grasping
>
> are a source of delight to the wise,
>
> like a lotus blossoming in fire.
>
> Ordained practitioners have a special responsibility
>
> in preserving the holy Dharma.
>
> They should live in the four higher ways,
>
> such as moderation, and so forth,
>
> should have few needs and
>
> learn to be content with a simple life.
>
> One should live with few possessions
>
> and dwell with one's back turned
>
> to the things that cause grasping.

Sometimes monastics will begin their monastic life with a sincere motivation but later be sabotaged by various types of attachment and conceit. The Buddha warned (MN 29.2):

> When he has gone forth thus, he acquires gain, honor, and renown. He is pleased with that gain, honor, and renown, and his intention is fulfilled. On account of it he lauds himself and disparages others thus: "I have gain, honor, and renown, but these other monastics are unknown, of no account." He becomes intoxicated with that gain, honor, and renown, grows

> negligent, falls into negligence, and being negligent, he lives in suffering.

The Buddha compares this to someone who needs heartwood to make an article but passes up the heartwood and takes twigs and leaves instead, thinking he will be able to build what he wants with those. Such a person is sadly mistaken and will not be able to fulfill his aim.

Attachment to offerings and honor are not the only trap for monastics. The sūtra continues, talking about a monk who practices ethical conduct well. He receives gain, honor, and renown but is not pleased with them. He rejoices over his practice of the precepts — and it is fitting to do so — however, he then becomes arrogant because of this, praising himself for upholding the precepts well and disparaging others for being sloppy or immoral. Such attachment and arrogance — this time in relation to the keeping of pure precepts — makes him become self-satisfied, complacent, and negligent in developing further virtues. As a result, he too abides in suffering.

Similar results occur when attachment and arrogance arise in a monastic who has attained serenity, gained supernormal powers, or gotten a taste of temporary liberation in deep concentration. In each case, conceit can cloud the mind, causing the person to become complacent and smug. They lose energy and do not fulfill the noble aspirations they had when joining the Saṅgha. We must remain humble and focused on the ultimate attainments of liberation and awakening.

Meditation on the kindness of others and the disadvantages of the self-centered attitude are good antidotes to such conceit and complacency. Seeing the kindness we have received from others makes us vividly aware that everything we know and all that we have accomplished is not due to an inherently spectacular ability in ourselves. To the contrary, it is due to the kindness of those who have taught us, cared for us, and encouraged us. Therefore conceit is totally inappropriate. When we consider how self-importance and smugness have sabotaged us during our beginningless lives in cyclic existence, we develop antipathy toward these mental poisons. Strong mindfulness and introspective awareness arise; we are

determined to not fall prey to such self-defeating habits and to remain true to our spiritual aims. To help us do that, the Buddha recommended that all monastics reflect thus (AN 10.48):

> Monastics, there are these ten points that one who has gone forth should often reflect on. What ten?
>
> One gone forth should repeatedly reflect: "I have entered a different and special way of life."
>
> One gone forth should repeatedly reflect: "My livelihood [requisites] depend upon others."
>
> One gone forth should repeatedly reflect: "My deportment should be different [calmer]. There remain further practices that I must do."
>
> One gone forth should repeatedly reflect: "Do I reproach myself concerning faults in my conduct?"
>
> One gone forth should repeatedly reflect: "Do my wise companions in the spiritual life find fault with my conduct?"
>
> One gone forth should repeatedly reflect: "I must part and be separated from everyone and everything dear and agreeable to me."
>
> One gone forth should repeatedly reflect: "I am the owner of my kamma, heir of my kamma, I have kamma as my origin, kamma as my relative, kamma as my resort; I will be the heir of whatever kamma, good or bad, that I do."
>
> One gone forth should repeatedly reflect: "How am I spending my days and nights?"
>
> One gone forth should repeatedly reflect: "Do I delight in solitary dwellings or not?"
>
> One gone forth should repeatedly reflect: "Have I experienced any profound truths or wise insights of the ariyas, so that when facing death, I do not feel embarrassed when questioned by my spiritual companions?"

> Monastics, these are the ten points that one who has gone forth should reflect on.

Since attachment to family and attraction to people don't disappear upon receiving precepts, the Buddha gave advice to monastics on the proper way to relate to lay followers. The Pāli commentary *Sāratthappakāsinī* by Buddhaghosa explains (SN 798n272):

> As the moon gliding across the sky does not form intimacy, affection, or attachment with anyone, nor give rise to fondness, longing, or obsession, yet remains dear and agreeable to the multitude, so you too should not form intimacy and so forth with anyone. Then, by doing so, you will approach families like the moon, dear and agreeable to the multitude. Further, as the moon dispels darkness and emits light, so you will dispel the darkness of defilements and emit the light of knowledge.

This advice is so moving that all of us, lay and monastic, would do well to heed it. Open-hearted care and concern free from longing and guilt is a healthy way to relate to others.

How do lay followers handle a situation in which a monastic is not behaving according to the precepts? First, we should try to prevent such situations from occurring. For example, lay practitioners should not invite monastics to join them in watching movies with sex and violence. They should not drink alcohol or take recreational drugs in the presence of monastics, take monastics to a casino, hug monastics of the opposite sex, or of the same sex if they are gay. I have heard of all the above happening; such activities are not suitable for monastics, and lay followers must be aware of this. Also, refrain from offering monastics luxury items; some monks become spoiled by lay followers who dote on them.

In the *Inquiry of Ugra Sūtra*, the Buddha gave advice on how to regard a monastic who has transgressed precepts. Without disrespecting the person, we think that the robes are the robes of the fully awakened Buddha, who is free from all pollutants and has complete ethical conduct, concentration, wisdom, and liberation.

As such, we have respect for āryas and generate compassion for the monastic. Without whitewashing the situation, we recognize this person's conduct is not appropriate although he wears the Buddha's robes. But since the Buddha advised us not to despise the unlearned, we recall that it is the person's afflictions that have committed the offense. Since this person has access to the Buddha's teachings, if he studies and practices them in the future, he will come to know, confess, and rectify his lapses. In this case, he will still be able to become an ārya and a buddha one day.[37]

In this way, we protect ourselves from becoming judgmental or from losing faith. In addition, we think, "I, too, have the seeds within me to act in inappropriate and nonvirtuous ways. Thus I will learn from observing this person and invigorate my mindfulness and introspective awareness to prevent myself from acting in a similar manner."

The Vinaya contains many ways for monastics to confess and make amends for the various types of transgressions. Monasteries with knowledgeable monastics know and practice these ways, thus benefitting the individual, the Saṅgha, and the public.

An important purpose of monastic life is to reduce attachment, and for that, it is essential that monastics live simply. When Atiśa came to Tibet, a big reception was held to welcome him, and monks wearing elaborate costumes and headgear assembled on horseback. Appalled by this extravagant display, Atiśa covered his head with his upper robe and said, "The Tibetan ghosts are coming!" Seeing this, the monks asked what happened and learned that Atiśa was unhappy because they did not have a simple appearance. They descended from their horses and changed into ordinary robes. Seeing this, Atiśa was pleased.

In Tibet before 1959, some abbots and monks wore very elaborate and impressive robes and costumes that reflected their status and connection to rich benefactors and powerful personages. It seems they had more respect for the paraphernalia given by rich benefactors than the robes given by the Buddha. As Kedrup, Tsongkhapa's disciple, noted, "If monastics do not maintain integrity and instead indulge in excesses, it is a sign of the

degeneration of the Dharma." Therefore monastics must constantly strengthen their motivation to renounce the duḥkha of cyclic existence and attain awakening. As monastics, their task is to learn, think, and meditate on the vast and profound teachings as much as possible. In conjunction with this, they should teach, translate, write, and lead others in practice so that the Dharma will be upheld in our world.

Monastics must be celibate. There are no exceptions: abstention from sexual intercourse is one of the four root precepts, transgression of which means that person is no longer a monastic. While we sometimes hear stories of great practitioners who have consorts, these people are not monastics. If a monastic reaches the level where he or she is capable of doing the consort practice — isolated mind on the completion stage — he should give back his monastic precepts and return to lay life. Tsongkhapa had attained the stage where he was capable of practicing with a consort in order to dissolve the winds into the indestructible drop at his heart. However, with great compassion for sentient beings and great respect for the Vinaya, he chose not to do this and remained a monk for the rest of his life. He knew that living as a pure monastic would be a clearer and more inspiring example for future generations of monastics. At the time of his death, when the winds naturally dissolve, he meditated on the clear light and attained the next level of tantric realization.

Discipline in monasteries must be strict regarding this point. The Indian yogi Virūpa (8th–9th century), from whom the Sakya lineage stems, was a monk at Nālandā Monastery in India. While he studied Pāramitāyāna, he also practiced highest yoga tantra. One night the disciplinarian at Nālandā was making the evening rounds, and from Virūpa's room he heard women's voices. Opening the door, he saw women who, although they looked like prostitutes, were ḍākinīs. We don't know if the disciplinarian recognized them as such, but in any case he said that because this was a monastery for monks, they must leave. He also expelled Virūpa from the monastery. Even though Virūpa was highly realized, no exception was made for him — in the monastery everyone had to keep the root prātimokṣa precepts no matter their

level of realization. I think that is wonderful. Someone who has developed internal Tantrayāna realizations should return his or her monastic precepts and practice tantra outside the monastery.

I doubt that everyone who thinks they are at the level of doing consort practice is capable of doing it. A person does not make this decision for himself; he follows the instructions of his lama. A previous incarnation of Serkong Dorje Chang was a monk when he attained the level in which practice with a consort would be beneficial. Following the advice of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama, he returned to lay life and married even though he was capable of intercourse without emission. This demonstrated his compassion for others — he did not want them to lose faith in the Saṅgha — and his respect for monasticism.

Monastics who are spiritually accomplished must also maintain the prātimokṣa discipline. Vinaya and the prātimokṣa precepts were established in accord with ordinary, worldly conventions, and they should be kept in that perspective. Unconventional behavior or public displays of supernormal powers could lead other monastics without such accomplishments astray and cause confusion in the minds of lay followers.

Some people put on the mask of being a religious practitioner but are corrupt. Many Christian monastics live simple, contented lives; some live as hermits their whole lives. A cloistered French monastery allowed me to visit. The abbot who received me was barefoot. Some years ago, Pope Francis dismissed a German bishop because he was living a luxurious life. Abbots of our monasteries should do likewise if the monks are living luxuriously. Monastics must learn the Dharma and Vinaya and apply it to their lives. If we sincerely believe in contentment coming from a simple lifestyle, we won't be hypocritical and destroy the faith of others.

Some monastic precepts must be kept strictly, but in certain circumstances the Vinaya allows exceptions. Monasteries may vary in terms of how certain precepts are kept. Personally, I prefer that the precepts are followed more strictly. Once we make an exception for one thing, it's like a crack that eventually becomes bigger and bigger. From the beginning, it's important to follow the discipline

closely. We should not relax the discipline just to have more monastics. Quality is more important than quantity.

REFLECTION

1. Why is it important for the individual and for society that monastics keep their precepts well?
2. If you are a monastic, reflect on the ten points the Buddha asked monastics to contemplate. If you are a lay follower, reflect on ways you can help monastics to keep their precepts.

Tibetan Monastics and Monastic Institutions

The prātimokṣa precepts are to help us regulate actions of body and speech, and in doing so, they make us look at the mind that motivates our physical and verbal actions. Keeping all the precepts meticulously is extremely difficult; not all Tibetan monks are perfect and follow the precepts to the smallest detail. But I think Tibetan monks in general keep the major precepts of the 253 bhikṣu precepts. The great majority of Tibetan monastics are sincere practitioners, and they form the core of our monastic institutions. They engage in the three major Vinaya rites — the fortnightly confession and restoration of precepts, the rains retreat, and the invitation for correction at the conclusion of the rains retreat. Monastics who do not follow the important precepts are a sign of degeneration. We cannot deny their existence, but they do not represent all Tibetan monastics. In any religious group there are usually a few mischievous people, but to blame the entire community for the bad behavior of a few individuals is wrong.

We should look to the people who practice well for inspiration and not dwell on those who fail to do so. If we can help them improve their conduct, that is good, but if they transgress a root precept, they are no longer monastics and must be expelled from the Saṅgha.

Some lay lamas have families, yet they wear robes that look similar to monastic robes. This is confusing to the public. I have advised them to wear white robes to distinguish themselves from

the Saṅgha, but some do not. Some laypeople put on monastic robes in order to collect offerings during large pujas where thousands of people are in attendance. These people are not actual monks, and their pretending to be so creates heavy nonvirtuous karma.

Some monastics in both the Dharmagupta and Mūlasarvāstivāda traditions do not eat in the afternoon. This is wonderful. Most Theravāda monastics also do this; in addition, some go on alms round (*piṇḍapāta*) and some do not touch money. This is also admirable. Due to the large percentage of the Tibetan population that is monastic, practical constraints prevent us from following some of these practices.

Prior to 1959, approximately one-quarter of the male population in Tibet were monks. In the Lhasa area, the monasteries were the size of small towns. Ganden Monastery had approximately 4,000 monks, Sera 8,000, and Drepung 10,000. These large monasteries, and many of the smaller ones, also function as schools where the monks study the main philosophical treatises for up to twenty years. The study program includes classes with a teacher, memorization, many hours of debate, pujas, Vinaya rites, and other group activities. Many young boys join the monasteries. They usually live with an older monk in one of the group houses in the monastery. These large monasteries are schools where children are raised within a lifestyle consisting of religious study and practice. Needless to say, with so many children, adolescents, and young adults who are not only memorizing and studying but also bursting with energy, Tibetan monasteries generally are not the quiet, remote hermitages found in some other Buddhist countries.

The Buddhist tradition of debate originated in ancient India. In the Pāli sūtras we see that the Buddha himself discussed and debated philosophical principles with the renunciates and brahmans of his time. In later centuries, large monastic universities such as Taxila, Nālandā, Odantapurī, and Vikramaśīla came into being. At these sites monastics used debate as a pedagogical tool for their own learning, as well as to establish the validity of the Buddha's teachings when confronted by the challenges of non-

Buddhist scholars. As an extension of the Nālandā tradition, Tibetan Buddhism does the same.

An important element for a successful debating program is a large number of students. By having many people to discuss the Dharma with, monastics are exposed to a variety of viewpoints and perspectives that help to enhance the breadth of their understanding. They learn to evaluate doctrines based on sound logical arguments. Of the three wisdoms, the education program in Tibetan monasteries emphasizes the development of the wisdoms of learning and contemplating. The wisdom of meditation is usually cultivated privately.

Given the large number of monks at these major Tibetan monasteries, it would have been impossible for local villagers to give alms on a daily basis. Even if the monks had gone to Lhasa, several hours' walk by foot, all the streets would have been jammed! Although laypeople brought donations of food to the monasteries, it was difficult to obtain the amount needed to feed so many monastics, and pots big enough to cook for thousands could not be found. Therefore the monks prepared meals in their smaller group houses within the monastery. This necessitated buying and cooking their own food, and for that reason they handled money.

This same system has continued in exile. It would be too difficult for Tibetan refuge settlements or local Indian villages to offer food to thousands of monastics each day. Furthermore, the monastics are immersed in study programs that are time-intensive, so it is easier for a few monastics to buy food and cook for a larger group. The food is served and eaten quickly so they can return to their studies.

The monastics in some Tibetan monasteries observe the practice of not taking food after midday. They gather for the midday meal and have only tea the rest of the day. I once instructed a monastery in Dharamsala to do that, but it proved to be fruitless. Although the monastery did not serve an evening meal, the monks prepared food in their rooms on one-burner stoves.

Unlike Christian monasteries and Buddhist monasteries in other Asian countries where the monastery supplies robes, shoes,

and bags and covers medical and travel expenses, Tibetan monks must supply these themselves. For this reason, too, they use money. They usually receive donations from relatives or friends, or use the offerings distributed during large ceremonies and teachings. In some monasteries, breakfast is provided to all monks who attend the morning puja, and when benefactors sponsor pujas, they often offer a meal to the assembly. In India, the Tibetan Nuns' Project has been able to provide food for the nuns enrolled in some nunneries. However, some of these nunneries are overcrowded, and some nuns must live outside and provide for themselves. Such practical concerns require that Tibetan monastics use money to buy necessities.

In Tibet and in the early years of our lives as refugees in India, some monks studied and practiced with their belly only half full. I know some excellent monks who are now Dharma teachers for whom this was the case.

Some people think that Tibetan monks do not keep Vinaya strictly because they practice tantra. This is not the case. In fact, tantric precepts are stricter because they pertain to mental actions as well as physical and verbal behavior. Practitioners who observe the tantric ethical code and commitments should also observe Vinaya because Vinaya precepts are easier to keep and are good preparation for taking the bodhisattva and tantric precepts. Practicing Tantrayāna should not be used as an excuse to neglect Vinaya. Quite the opposite, we should be stricter in practicing Vinaya because if we aren't, how can we expect to observe the tantric ethical code, which is more difficult to follow?

Challenges for Western Monastics

The situation for Western monastics is especially difficult because few monasteries are established in the West, and while living in India they face visa, health, and language difficulties. Because they are comparatively new to Buddhism, Western monastic aspirants are not always aware of the behavior expected of people holding prātimokṣa precepts. In addition, prospective candidates are not always properly screened or prepared before ordination. Although

they would like training in Vinaya, it is not always available to them in their own language. Western monastics often end up living on their own or at Dharma centers, where they work and receive room and board.

In 1993, during a conference with Western Buddhist teachers, some Western monastics told me of the difficulties they face, and I began to weep. We must think and then act to remedy this situation.

The best solution is for Western monastics to begin monasteries and to develop their own training programs, and we Tibetans can help from our side. Monastics who wish to train in India can establish Western khamtsens (houses) in the Tibetan monasteries and nunneries. In addition to the two-week preordination course currently taught by Western monastics in Dharamsala, India, intensive training courses could be held after ordination, as is done in Taiwan.

Geshes and khenpos at Dharma centers should educate Western monastics in the Vinaya and do the fortnightly poṣadha (T. *gso sbyong*) with them. This is important not only for the students but also for the teachers' practice. They should also have special courses where they teach Western monastics the prohibitive and prescriptive precepts and monastic etiquette. I think it is wise for senior Western monastics as well as the geshe or khenpo to assess the aspirants because Westerners can more easily detect potential problematic areas with candidates from their own culture.

The gradual approach of the Christian monasteries — where a candidate for ordination must pass through many stages before receiving full precepts — works well. This gives the person time to think about monastic life and evaluate if it is suitable for them. The monastic community also has the opportunity to assess the suitability of the candidate. I encourage Westerners who are considering monastic ordination to live in a monastery as a layperson for some time so that they have an experience of living and practicing in a monastic community. Then they can slowly take the progressive levels of ethical precepts and adjust to each level before assuming the next.

To receive the four requisites — food, clothing, shelter, and medicine — monastics need the support of lay practitioners. My hope is that lay followers will support Western monastics and reap the benefit of having Dharma practitioners who share their culture and language. At present, many monastics in the West must hold a job in order to sustain themselves; this makes keeping their precepts and living a monastic lifestyle of simplicity difficult. Many lay followers prefer to donate to monasteries where they see a group of monastics practicing together. Although some Saṅgha members prefer the independence of living alone, they must also accept the difficulties that entails.

After they have received some years of initial training in a monastic setting, some monastics may wish to do as the Tibetan sage Drom Tonpa advised: remain in an isolated area with a small group of peers who have similar attitudes and do similar spiritual practices. Although they may live separately, they remain together as a spiritual community. Then when difficulties arise — sickness or spiritual problems — spiritual companions can help. In addition, by staying with "friends in ethical conduct," they will support one another in being conscientious and refraining from negativities.

Monastics who are also teachers must carry their sense of renunciation wherever they live. To maintain that, living with other monastics — be they our teachers, peers, or students — is valuable. Although monasteries are rare in the West at present, the hope is that more will be built in the future. This will really help the rooting and flourishing of the Dharma in the West. In the meantime, monastics who do not live in community should cultivate friendships with spiritual comrades with similar views, aspirations, and precepts. They can then discuss the Dharma and various challenges they face together.

Full Ordination for Women

As noted above, Vinaya texts delineate different levels of monastic ordination. For men, there is full ordination (*bhikṣu*) and novice (*śrāmaṇera*). For women, there is full ordination (*bhikṣuṇī*), training (*śikṣamāṇā*), and novice (*śrāmaṇerī*). According to the

Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya, a Saṅgha of at least ten bhikṣus (five in outlying areas) must be present for a novice monk to receive bhikṣu ordination. For a training nun to receive bhikṣuṇī ordination, she first goes before a Saṅgha of at least ten bhikṣuṇīs (five in an outlying area), where she receives the abiding-in-pure-conduct[38] (*brahmacāryapasthana*, T. *tshangs spyod nyer gnas*). Then, in the same day, she goes before a Saṅgha of at least ten (or five in an outlying area) bhikṣus and a Saṅgha of bhikṣuṇīs, where she receives the full bhikṣuṇī ordination. Fewer monastics are needed to preside over novice ordination.

The lineage of full ordination for men came to Tibet from India with Śāntarakṣita (725–88) and his disciples, who established the first monastery in Tibet at Samye in 775. Unfortunately, when Śāntarakṣita brought Indian monks to Tibet, he did not bring nuns. It would have looked suspect had celibate monks traveled with celibate nuns. Because of the lack of requisite bhikṣuṇīs to have the bhikṣuṇī ordination, this ordination never took root in Tibet, although Tibetan women did receive the novice (*śrāmaṇerī*) ordination.

The lineage of full ordination for both men and women was established in Sri Lanka in the third century BCE by King Aśoka's son and daughter, who were both fully ordained monastics. Both lineages were decimated due to the Chola invasions of Sri Lanka in the eleventh century. The bhikṣu lineage was reestablished immediately, but it was not until 1998, when some Sri Lanka nuns received full ordination from Taiwanese monastics, that the bhikṣuṇī lineage was reinstituted. Now there are well over one thousand Theravāda bhikṣuṇīs. Many Western women have received Theravāda bhikṣuṇī ordination.

The first bhikṣu ordination in China occurred around 249–53, and the first dual bhikṣuṇī ordination in 434. The lineage of bhikṣuṇī ordination exists in Taiwan, China, Korea, and Vietnam to this day. These nuns are well-educated and leaders in the Buddhist community. Some Western women and a handful of Tibetan women have taken bhikṣuṇī ordination from Chinese, Vietnamese, and Korean Saṅghas.

Scholars have found a few examples of Tibetan lamas giving bhikṣuṇī ordination in Tibet in previous centuries. These ordinations were given in an irregular manner. A question therefore arises regarding the authenticity of that ordination. It is a bhikṣuṇī ordination, but it was not given in the perfect manner. Understanding the nature, purity, and authenticity of an ordination is complex. For example, when someone receives ordination from a preceptor whose ordination has degenerated, if the new monastic is not aware of the preceptor's degeneration, he or she receives the precepts, but the ordination was given imperfectly because the number of monks needed to give it may not have been sufficient.

For many decades I have expressed the hope that the bhikṣuṇī ordination will be given in the Tibetan tradition. When our kind teacher, Buddha Śākyamuni, established the bhikṣuṇī order, he affirmed women's ability to attain liberation. He explained that the fourfold Saṅgha — fully ordained monks and nuns, and male and female lay followers — harmoniously practicing the Buddhadharma would ensure that his teachings would remain a long time in this world for the benefit of all. If the fourfold assembly is complete, the place becomes a central land, one of the conditions for our precious human life. I often tell Tibetan masters that the introduction of the bhikṣuṇī order is a service to the Buddhadharma, for at present the fourfold assembly is not complete in our culture. Bhikṣuṇī ordination is especially important now, when nuns' education has vastly improved and many nuns are qualified to teach.

I feel that equal opportunity regarding ordination is important. Citing passages in the Vinaya, some Tibetan Vinaya masters suggest that under special circumstances, a valid bhikṣuṇī ordination can be performed by the bhikṣu Saṅgha alone. These special circumstances include a place where bhikṣuṇīs are not available to give the ordination because no bhikṣuṇīs reside in that area or because it is too dangerous for bhikṣuṇīs to travel to that place. Previous and contemporary masters in the Chinese community agree with this.

The bhikṣuṇī ordination is a matter for the Saṅgha[39] as a whole to discuss. No one person has the authority to make the decision.

Some people imply that as the Dalai Lama, I can issue a decree introducing the bhikṣuṇī lineage in my tradition, but this is not possible. We must follow the procedure for making major decisions set out in the Vinaya, and this necessitates a group decision by the Saṅgha.

Regarding this issue, the process is complex because the bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha participating in a dual ordination would have to be from the Dharmaguptaka lineage, but the Tibetan bhikṣus follow the Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya. Various conferences have been held on this topic both in India and the West, but no definitive conclusion has been reached, although a conference of Tibetan monks said that Tibetan nuns could go to Taiwan to receive the ordination from Chinese monks. However, then the Tibetan nuns would be Dharmaguptaka bhikṣuṇīs and could not do joint Vinaya activities with Tibetan monks who are from the Mūlasarvāstivāda tradition. Furthermore, the nuns' teachers, who are predominantly monks, tell them it is unnecessary to become bhikṣuṇīs because they already have novice ordination and hold the bodhisattva and tantric ethical codes.[40]

Since Vinaya is a practice common to Theravāda, Chinese, and Tibetan Buddhism, discussing this at the international level would be excellent. Representatives of all traditions would be present to discuss the research and to discuss varying interpretations of Vinaya. These representatives need not be highly ranked bhikṣus. It is more important that good Vinaya scholars and practitioners come together — in a Buddhist holy site if possible — to discuss this. After informal, open discussions, a decision could be made by this international group. Decisions made in this way will be easy for everyone across Vinaya traditions to follow. In preparation for that, it would be good if Tibetan bhikṣus were to agree on a way in which the Mūlasarvāstivāda bhikṣuṇī ordination could be given. Many heads of Tibet's Buddhist lineages have expressed similar support for this, and the present Karmapa has taken active steps to introduce bhikṣuṇī ordination. However, many monks are still very conservative.

We Tibetans were very fortunate that after the bhikṣu Saṅgha was decimated during the reign of King Langdarma in the ninth

century, we were able to restore the bhikṣu lineage, which was on the verge of extinction in Tibet. As a result, many people have been able to listen, reflect, and meditate on the Dharma as fully ordained monks. This has been of great benefit to Tibetan society and to sentient beings in general. It is my hope that we can find a way to establish the bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha in the Tibetan community as well.

In the meantime, several individual nuns who practice Tibetan Buddhism have received bhikṣuṇī ordination in the Dharmaguptaka Vinaya from Chinese, Vietnamese, or Korean Saṅghas. We recognize them as bhikṣuṇīs. I encourage them to do the three primary Saṅgha rites together: the fortnightly purification and restoration of precepts, the rains retreat, and the ceremony concluding the rains retreat. Some of these nuns are now establishing monasteries in the West.[41]

According to Vinaya, full ordination is available to both male and female practitioners equally. However, the bias against women in Indian culture at the Buddha's time is reflected in certain aspects of Vinaya. For example, a fully ordained monk is considered higher than a fully ordained nun, although there is no difference in hierarchy of the actual precepts.

In addition to introducing the bhikṣuṇī ordination, bhikṣuṇīs must also become objects of reverence. We must examine sexist passages in Buddhist texts. For example, in the rite to ordain male novices, there is a passage saying that while the bhikṣuṇī ordination is higher than the male novice ordination, bhikṣuṇīs are not objects of reverence for male novices. This discrimination needs to change.

I am heartened that now, for the first time in Tibetan history, there are nun geshes. They completed the same course of study as the monks, with the exception of studying the full Vinaya, and took the same geshe exams. In December 2016 I was delighted to present the first twenty female geshes their geshe degrees at the convocation held at Drepung Monastery in South India. In future years, more nuns will complete their studies, take the exams, and receive their geshe degrees. Ever since the 1960s, I have advocated for better education for the nuns, and with the aid of the Tibetan Women's Project, the Department of Religious and Cultural

Affairs, the monk geshes who instructed the nuns, and most of all, the effort of the nuns themselves, this has been accomplished. As women's education continues to improve, more and more women can take up leadership positions, and with their natural tendency toward compassion, they will make a positive contribution to the Buddhadharma and to society.

We must look also from the larger perspective of the bodhisattva and tantric ethical codes. Especially in tantra, not showing respect to women is a downfall. Women are objects of reverence, so it would be inconsistent to practice tantra yet discriminate against women.

Advice for Monastics

I would like to speak now to those of you who are monastics. The heart of Buddhadharma is nonviolence, and the foundation for training ourselves in nonviolence is ethical conduct, specifically restraint from the seven destructive actions of body and speech that directly harm others and the three nonvirtues of mind that indirectly harm others by motivating harmful physical and verbal behavior. Taking and keeping monastic precepts is a huge aid in cultivating nonviolence, and living in a monastery supports you in keeping the precepts. Just by following the daily schedule and the discipline and guidelines, you will abandon coarse destructive actions and cultivate good qualities. Lone trees are twisted and felled by the wind, but trees in a forest protect each other from the wind and grow upward together. Similarly, monastics grow in the same direction — the three higher trainings, bodhicitta, and so forth — together. Living together in a monastery — in an environment designed for Dharma practice — they can easily keep their precepts and progress on the path. Monastics support one another in avoiding negativities and help one another to purify negativities.

Since we have obtained a precious human life, now is the time to stop the suffering of cyclic existence. When we are laypeople, we face many interruptions to Dharma practice. Ordained life, in contrast, gives us great opportunity to engage in Dharma practice.

Therefore we should appreciate the lives and qualities of a monastic lifestyle and recognize the faults of a householder's lifestyle.

Of course, nonmonastics can practice the Dharma, but laypeople need to take care of their families, which necessitates working to gather financial resources. There is then the need to decide how to spend the money and how to protect the things acquired with it. Householders with children worry about their education and behavior when they're young, and about their livelihood and relationships when they are older. Living within a family, they are attached to people and will make enemies when others hurt their dear ones. In these circumstances, even though they wish to practice the Dharma, they are compelled by the situation to spend most of their life, energy, and time looking after relatives as well as the practical matters that concern their well-being: family income, investments, and long-term financial planning; conflicts among family members and crises in their lives; the education and upbringing of children; various social obligations, and so forth. Of course these activities can be done with a positive motivation, but for many people their motivation is one of attachment. Concerning themselves with so many things that distract their minds, it is often difficult to find time to study and practice the Dharma. On the other hand, monastics are free from such activities and obligations.

By contemplating the difference in lifestyles, be aware of the importance of not engaging in unnecessary activities and of cultivating contentment. If a monastic is not content with what he or she has, his life will be similar to that of a layperson. There is not much sense in simply shaving your hair if you do not practice as a monastic and cultivate Dharma qualities in your heart and mind. A foremost practice is to abandon afflictions. The *Sūtra of Mindfulness* (*Mdo dran pa nyer gzhag*) says:

> Pleasant and sweet are the afflictions at first;
>
> however, they ripen into piercing pain.
>
> Seeing that they bring you despair,
>
> abandon them as you would poison.

Many serious practitioners choose to live in nature, remaining in the forest or near the sea, where they watch the rising and falling of the waves and experience the changes in seasons. Here they reflect on impermanence, seeing their body as transient. On this basis, they develop a sense of disillusionment and disgust with saṃsāra and the afflictions that cause it. They focus their minds on realizing emptiness and on seeing the world and sentient beings in it as like illusions. Monastics are more likely than householders to have the time and circumstances for such serious practice.

It is helpful for monastics, no matter how long they have been ordained, to contemplate repeatedly some of the verses in the ordination ceremony.[42]

> Transmigrating in the three realms,
>
> one is not able to sever attachment.
>
> Give up attachment and enter nirvāṇa.
>
> That is the true way to repay kindness.
>
> Guard integrity and aspiration.
>
> Cut the bonds of family and kin.
>
> Leave your worldly home to practice the Dharma.
>
> Aspire to lead all beings to full awakening.
>
> Go forth to enter the path.
>
> Cut off bonds and bid family farewell.
>
> Now you are imbued with the precepts.
>
> Resolve to cut nonvirtue and cultivate compassion.
>
> Renounce illusion, return to the truth.
>
> How happy is the door to liberation.

Whether or not you are ordained, it would be beneficial to develop appreciation for the simplicity of a monastic life. Even if you are unable or do not want to be ordained in this life, appreciating the monastic way of life will leave an imprint so you can be ordained in future lives.

The Joy of Monastic Discipline

To express in a brief way the respect I have for monastic discipline, I would like to share with you a poem I wrote in 1973.

> How appropriate it is for those fortunate to follow you,
> the Buddha who taught great purity,
> to engage with minds of faith
> in pure conduct beyond reproach.
> Externally pure and also internally pure,
> this is the Buddhist tradition;
> it produces every temporary and ultimate benefit.
> How auspicious to meet with
> this medicine benefitting both self and others.
> This opportunity is found this once,
> is difficult to find again,
> and those who strive are so few.
> Make firm effort in your heart
> and apply yourself to pure conduct in a hundred ways.
> Since without a doubt such a path
> can easily subdue the very coarse afflictions,
> why even mention freedom from the duḥkha
> experienced in the householder's life?
> With discipline as the root,
> what cannot be produced
> from the mighty tree of the Mahāyāna path:
> bodhicitta and the union of serenity and insight?
> The extremely swift, ultimate secret path,
> the magnificent and praiseworthy method

to transform strong poison into medicine —
the foundation of this, too,
is ethical restraint.
Eh ma! Cherish this discipline,
which is the cause of attaining swiftly, swiftly
the inseparable union of emptiness and compassion,
the state of Vajradhara.
Therefore, O friends with intelligence,
do not disparage or hold as trivial
the prātimokṣa ethical code,
which originates in the śrāvakas' scriptures.
Discipline is praised as the basis and root of the doctrine.
One should strive to maintain it carefully
by study and analysis,
with mindfulness and introspective awareness.
Guard it respectfully with conscientiousness and integrity.
Do not be lazy or indifferent,
lest you snap the root of lasting happiness.
I have spoken these words with the thought to benefit,
lest the purpose be diminished.
By the kindness of the great father Mañjughoṣa
and my kind and qualified spiritual mentors,
this monk from Amdo, Tenzin Gyatso,
has written this with heartfelt respect for these practices.
Forsaking eloquence in composition,
it was composed in a plain and simple style.

By any merits it may have,

may all mother sentient beings in general,

and especially many intelligent young people from the Land of Snows,

engage in the practice of this path

and touch the ground of supreme awakening.

May all good fortune increase![43]

6 | The Higher Training in Concentration and the Perfection of Meditative Stability

THE HIGHER TRAINING in concentration is typically discussed in the context of the fourth truth, the true path, and the perfection of meditative stability is usually explained in the context of the six bodhisattva perfections, emphasizing that it must be done with the bodhicitta motivation. However, they deal with the same topics — conducive conditions for cultivating serenity, observed objects, techniques to deal with hindrances and faults, and the attainment of serenity and higher meditative absorptions. For that reason, the higher training in concentration and the perfection of meditative stability will be discussed together here. In keeping with my wish that the Library of Wisdom and Compassion be unique and bring in perspectives of other Buddhist traditions, after the presentation following the Sanskrit tradition as practiced in Tibet, we'll look briefly at how concentration is cultivated in the Pāli and Chinese traditions. This will enlarge your knowledge and benefit your meditation practice.

Concentration and Serenity

Concentration (*samādhi*) is useful in all aspects of life, although its meaning in common parlance and in spiritual practice differs. Artists, musicians, car mechanics, computer programmers, scholars, and truck drivers have a certain type of concentration, as do children absorbed in a computer game. While useful, this is not the type of concentration cultivated in meditative practice when the mind is focused and absorbed on only one object. When we fix an appliance, play music, or throw a football, we must attend to many objects to perform that one task, whereas in stabilizing meditation the mind is trained to stay put unwaveringly on one object.

"Concentration" has various meanings depending on the context. In the study of mind and awareness, concentration is one of the five object-ascertaining mental factors that all of us have, even though it may not be adequately developed at present. In the eightfold path, it refers to the single-pointed concentration that leads to gaining states of *dhyāna* (P. *jhāna*) — meditative absorptions of the form realm. As one of the three higher trainings, concentration includes three factors of the eightfold path: right mindfulness, right effort, and right concentration. In this case, the emphasis of samādhi is more on developing skill in meditation in general as well as the ability to keep the mind focused on virtue during daily life. In other contexts, "concentration" refers to special meditations that enable a practitioner to engage in a specific activity.

Samādhi unifies the primary mind and its associated mental factors in a balanced way so that mindfulness and attention on the object are sustained and the mind is tranquil. This differs from our usual distracted mind that is subject to a flood of external sensory stimuli, jumps from one thought to another, or is overwhelmed with emotions such as anxiety, craving, or resentment. The scattered mind cannot understand things deeply; it sees only superficially and is often afflictive. Samādhi brings calm and gentleness. It is like a mirror that clearly reflects objects. Such a mind, when combined with wisdom, can bring deep understanding.

Serenity is concentration (*samādhi*) arisen from meditation and accompanied by the bliss of mental and physical pliancy in which the mind abides effortlessly without fluctuation for as long as we wish on whatever object it has been placed. Cultivating this state of single-pointed concentration requires diligent effort over time, and once attained, it must be maintained through continuous practice. The new calm and concentration beginners experience is wonderful, but it is not serenity, so do not be dismayed when later you are distracted. Similarly, do not try to re-create a marvelous meditative experience in your next session and become disappointed or frustrated when you can't. Developing concentration takes time and diligence.

The enthusiasm that newcomers to Buddhism have to gain concentration is commendable, and it will bear fruit if first they develop a broad understanding of the Buddhist path and cultivate a proper motivation. Cultivating single-pointedness of mind in order to gain psychic powers, be famous, or remain in a blissful meditative state is doing ourselves a great disservice.[44] Without a good motivation such powers could be misused, harming others and planting many seeds of destructive karma on our own mindstreams. At best, it creates the cause for rebirth in the form and formless realms while in saṃsāra. For this reason, most spiritual mentors begin by instructing students on meditation topics that will help them to generate the aspiration to be free from saṃsāra, the altruistic intention of bodhicitta, and the correct view of emptiness.

In general, meditation is of two types: stabilizing and analytical. Stabilizing meditation is predominantly used to develop serenity, and analytical meditation to develop insight. The difference between serenity and insight is not their object of meditation, but the way the mind engages with the object. Serenity focuses on it single-pointedly; insight analyzes it deeply to understand its characteristics. Although insight is often thought of in relation to emptiness, its object could be other phenomena. While serenity is often associated with meditation on the breath or the image of the Buddha, it can also focus on emptiness.

The teachings on the higher training in concentration and the perfection of meditative stability center on cultivating serenity, dhyānas of the form realm, and meditative absorptions of the formless realm. The Tibetan word translated as serenity has two syllables: *zhi* means "calm" and *gnas* is "to abide." This mental state is calm in that all distractions to external objects have ceased and all impediments to concentration — especially restlessness and laxity — have been calmed. It abides on an internal observed object. Serenity involves not only mental stability but also vibrant mental clarity. Those on the bodhisattva path can develop serenity either before or after generating uncontrived bodhicitta.

The Importance of Developing Serenity

Many benefits come from attaining serenity and the dhyānas. All our virtuous activities become more focused and thus have a stronger effect on our mind. Whether we meditate on the breath or lamrim topics, recite scriptures or prayers, do tantric visualizations or recite a mantra, being able to focus our mind single-pointedly facilitates understanding the meditation object and integrating Dharma meanings into our mind.

Serenity is the foundation for generating insight and the union of serenity and insight. When the union of the two is focused on emptiness, it has the power to uproot all afflictive and cognitive obscurations that cause saṃsāra and prevent us from attaining buddhahood.

Serenity makes the body and mind peaceful, bringing happiness in this life. It is the basis for cultivating mastery over external elements, as exemplified in the supernormal powers, and for actualizing the superknowledges, which expand our range of knowledge. Serenity is necessary to actualize the generation stage and completion stage of highest yoga tantra and thus become fully awakened.

Together with speaking of the benefits of serenity, meditation masters caution their disciples not to become attached to the bliss of concentration or to become complacent without developing further realizations. Having attained a meditative absorption of the form or formless realm, it is tempting to remain in that peaceful state, in which case we will not progress on the path to liberation and awakening, but will simply create the cause to be born in those realms in the future. Another danger is confusing the bliss of serenity and the absence of manifest afflictions during meditative absorption with liberation. Many non-Buddhist and Buddhist practitioners who have attained meditative absorptions have been sidetracked in these ways. Maintaining a strong and clear motivation, checking our meditative experiences with a qualified spiritual mentor, and following the advice of our spiritual mentors are extremely important so that we will realize our deepest spiritual goals.

Having said this, sometimes I think we Tibetans are overly cautious and neglect this crucial quality of single-pointed concentration. In my own case, even before we left Tibet I had genuine interest in emptiness, and after we went into exile in India I continued to make consistent effort to study and analyze the ultimate nature of phenomena. I got some feeling for it; however, due to the lack of single-pointed concentration, my practice has not progressed further. Saying *gate gate paragate parasamgate bodhi svaha*, the mantra in the *Heart Sūtra*, has little impact without serenity. If we are serious about actualizing the paths and grounds, we must engage in the practice of samādhi.

The two collections of merit and pristine wisdom are the requisites for attaining buddhahood, and to benefit others effectively, gaining the five superknowledges (*abhijñā*)[45] is essential. All these are attained on the basis of serenity and the dhyānas. Atiśa says in *Lamp for the Path to Awakening* (*Bodhipathapradīpa* 34–35, 38–39):

> All buddhas say the cause of the completion
>
> of the collections,
>
> whose nature is merit and pristine wisdom,
>
> is the development of the superknowledges.
>
> Just as a bird with undeveloped wings
>
> cannot fly in the sky,
>
> those without the power of the superknowledges
>
> cannot work for the good of living beings.
>
> In order to develop the superknowledges
>
> and the beyond-saṃsāra paths,
>
> you should first cultivate serenity.
>
> If your serenity practice is weak,
>
> you will gain no power
>
> even through sustained effort.

> Therefore accomplish the trainings
>
> in the various levels of samādhi.

Śāntideva likewise extols the benefit of serenity and emphasizes that it be accomplished prior to insight (BCA 8.4):

> Recognizing that the afflictions are eradicated
>
> by insight imbued with serenity,
>
> first seek serenity that is attained
>
> by those who joyfully renounce worldly [pleasures].

The wisdom realizing emptiness is the actual counterforce that destroys afflictions, their seeds, and latencies. To discern emptiness correctly and then keep our mind focused on it for great lengths of time, concentration and serenity are necessary. Concentration is a powerful state of mind that is able to control mental activity and the arising of afflictions. Serenity is a concentration that is supported by the bliss of pliancy, is able to keep the mind in equipoise on its object as we wish, and is based on the nine stages of sustained attention. Each of the nine stages of sustained attention is concentration in itself because each is the mental factor of concentration, but this alone is not sufficient to be what is usually called "concentration" or "samādhi."

In short, cultivating single-pointedness in general and attaining serenity in specific has many benefits. The *Sūtra Unraveling the Thought* (*Saṃdhinirmocana Sūtra*) says (LC 3:14):

> Maitreya, you should know that all mundane and supramundane virtuous qualities, whether of śrāvakas, bodhisattvas, or tathāgatas, are the result of serenity and insight.

REFLECTION

1. Contemplate the benefits of serenity: it is the foundation for gaining insight, it facilitates the collections of merit and wisdom, it is the basis for gaining the superknowledges, it brings great peace to the mind, and so forth.
2. Seeing these benefits, aspire to improve your concentration.

Conditions Conducive to the Development of Serenity

In Sūtrayāna, single-pointed concentration is cultivated with the coarse mental consciousness, which is related to our body. Thus, external factors — altitude, temperature, time of day, and physical health — influence our ability to meditate. In *Śrāvaka Grounds* (*Śrāvakabhūmi*), Asaṅga listed thirteen prerequisite conditions for the development of serenity; Kamalaśīla in his *Middle Stages of Meditation* (*Bhāvanākrama*) summarized these into six. It is important for someone who is entering retreat with the aspiration to attain serenity[46] to seek an appropriate environment with these six conditions. For us practitioners who are not in retreat, having as many of these conditions as possible facilitates our development of concentration.

The Chinese master Zhiyi (538–97) wrote extensively about how to generate serenity, dhyāna, and insight.[47] His list of important factors to have in place in order to generate serenity overlap with those of Kamalaśīla's listed below and are explained together with them.

1. *A favorable place* is one that is calm, quiet, and healthy; it is secluded and free from commotion and hubbub. It has clean water and air and is located where we can easily obtain food, clothing, shelter, and medicine. This minimizes disrupting our meditation schedule to seek requisites or engaging in wrong livelihoods to procure them. Meditating in a place inhabited by previous great meditators is recommended because such places have been blessed and positively influenced by their practice. The area should be safe, where illness, animals, human beings, or machines do not endanger our well-being. We should be near other meditators, teachers, or Dharma friends who can help us if hindrances or questions arise regarding practice.

Zhiyi explains that meditating in a dwelling in the mountains is best to avoid others disturbing us. If not, a hermitage located at least a mile from a village, where ascetic practices are done, is good. Minimum is a monastic dwelling (*saṃghārāma*) that is not near a

town or city. Whatever our residence, it should not require a lot of time and effort to maintain it.

2. Prior to entering strict retreat, we must develop a *clear and correct understanding of the instructions* to gain serenity and to overcome any errors and difficulties that arise. Studying not only the essential instructions on meditation but also the major scriptures on serenity will benefit our practice greatly. These include the description of the five faults and eight antidotes and the nine stages of sustained attention in texts written by Maitreya, Asaṅga, and Kamalaśīla. The *Sūtra Unraveling the Thought* (*Saṃdhinirmocana Sūtra*) also contains instructions on the practice to attain serenity.

Zhiyi instructs us to stay near our teacher and good Dharma friends. Teachers instruct and guide us through giving teachings, and Dharma friends encourage and support our cultivation. We support and encourage them in their Dharma practice, so we mutually benefit each other.

3. *Being free from coarse desires and having few desires* is important. Even if we live in a secluded place, if we crave a soft bed, music, delicious food, sex, or a good novel, our mind will be constantly distracted.

Zhiyi emphasizes that renouncing the five objects of sensual desire is essential for our meditation practice to progress. Attachment to visual forms, especially good-looking people, is a huge obstacle to cultivating concentration. Clinging to sounds — especially the sweet, ego-pleasing sounds of praise and reputation, not to mention singing and music — captivate and distract us. Remember that even the most delightful and endearing sounds do not last even a split-second; they vanish as soon as they arise, so there is nothing to cling to. Similarly, craving fragrances, tastes, and wonderful tactile sensations is fruitless, for these pleasures do not last, and procuring and protecting them easily lead to destructive karma and fritter away our precious human life.

4. A mind that is *satisfied and content* — one that doesn't desire "more and better" — is able to meditate. Such contentment is rare in modern society, where most people constantly try to better their

position and increase their possessions. We may have to combat much of our previous conditioning and the expectations of society and family to develop contentment.

Having sufficient clothing and food is important; otherwise the mind will be unduly disturbed, making meditation difficult. Yet being content with what we have can be challenging. Zhiyi explains three approaches to clothing, depending on our level of renunciation. The first is to wear a single cloak as the Buddha did in his previous lives as a bodhisattva. He did not see many people, and his body was strong enough to endure the elements. The second is to have only a single set of monastic robes, as Mahākāśyapa — a close disciple of the Buddha — did. The third, for people residing in cold climates whose ability to endure the weather is not developed, is to have an extra set of robes and other garments, as the Buddha permitted. However, they are to mentally offer these to the Buddha so as not to be self-indulgent or accumulate many possessions.

Similarly, there are three approaches to food. The superior person lives in nature, sustaining himself on the plants, fruits, and herbs found there. The middling consumes only the food offered on alms round, and in this way does not engage in wrong livelihood and maintains the ascetic practice. Someone with lower capacity dwells in a hermitage (*araṇya*, *arañña*) where a benefactor offers food, or lives with the Saṅgha community and eats the food offered to it.

5. Our *involvement in worldly activities must be minimal*. If we have a job and engage in many projects, they will occupy our mind, making concentration difficult. Writing emails, texting, reading social media, keeping a blog, reading books not related to the Dharma, or caring for family members will take us away from our meditation seat and occupy our attention when we're seated on it.

Zhiyi emphasizes that we must put our responsibilities to rest by ceasing the busyness of ordinary life. This involves ceasing to direct our energy toward making a living as well as avoiding the company of friends, relatives, and people who have no interest in or respect for Dharma practice. Furthermore, since other interests such as worldly careers, occult practices, and non-Dharma books

are distracting, they are to be avoided. Needless to say, nowadays we must forgo watching the news, checking the stock market, writing a blog, and keeping up with friends and events on social media.

6. *Pure ethical conduct*, keeping whatever precepts and commitments we have accepted, eliminates regret and remorse. At least we must abandon the ten destructive paths of actions. Without being able to control our coarse physical and verbal actions, which are motivated by coarse afflictions, we will not succeed in pacifying the mental factors that prevent concentration.

The remainder of this section comes from Zhiyi, who explained that pure ethical conduct is essential to prevent distractions and karmic obstacles that interfere with the cultivation of serenity. As in building a house, a firm foundation is necessary before constructing the walls or roof. The essence of ethical conduct is the three disciplines of the Mahāyāna: to abandon negativities, to accumulate virtue, and to benefit sentient beings. In this context he emphasized the importance of keeping a vegetarian diet, which stops the slaughter of many living beings.

Of the three levels of observing precepts, those who are supreme have not committed any of the five heinous crimes — matricide, patricide, killing an arhat, causing blood to flow from a Buddha, and causing a schism in a harmonious monastic Saṅgha. They meet a qualified spiritual mentor, take refuge and the five lay precepts, and may also have taken the novice or full monastic precepts. Guarding all the precepts well and avoiding the ten destructive actions, they are free from transgressions. Such disciples are analogous to a cloth that is completely clean and will easily absorb dye; they will attain serenity and insight.

Those who are middling keep the major precepts well but have many transgressions of the minor precepts. If they engage in sincere purification, their Dharma practice will be successful. They are similar to a dirty cloth that has been cleaned so that the dye will take.

The third group, disciples whose ethical conduct is weak, have committed many transgressions of both the major and minor

precepts. If the root monastic precepts have been broken with all factors intact, they are no longer monastics and may not reordain in that lifetime. Their destructive karmic seeds require purification, which can be done by sincere application of the appropriate means. To do this, they cultivate a clear understanding of and confidence in the law of karma and its effects, and fear experiencing the results of their destructive actions. They develop a sense of personal integrity and consideration for others and seek out methods to purify their offenses and negativities. Revealing and confessing their offenses and negativities, they have a strong determination not to do them again. With determination to protect the Dharma, they generate the great vow of bodhisattvas to liberate all sentient beings, which leads them to cultivate continuous mindfulness of the buddhas in all directions and to contemplate the offenses and negativities as empty of inherent existence.

With these elements and sincere regret especially for committing the serious offenses, they engage in purification practices until signs of purification arise. These signs include feeling their body and mind become light and pleasant, having auspicious dreams or seeing auspicious signs, witnessing their virtuous thoughts increase, understanding Dharma teachings, and experiencing Dharma joy and a mind free from worry and regret. In addition, they keep the precepts well in the future. Once they have restored good ethical conduct, they will be able to attain dhyāna. Such disciples resemble a very dirty and torn cloth that has sufficiently been patched and cleaned so that the dye will take.

Another way to purify the seeds of heavy destructive karma is, with strong regret, integrity, and consideration for others, to confess to the Three Jewels and pledge not to do such actions again. With firm concentration, they meditate that these karmas are empty by nature. They also maintain mindfulness of the buddhas in the ten directions, and in the break times offer incense and prostrate to them as well as recite the precepts and Mahāyāna sūtras.

Our activities during the break times between meditation sessions influence the success of our efforts very much. Please see

chapter 6 of *The Foundation of Buddhist Practice*, which discusses this.

REFLECTION

1. Review the meaning of each conducive condition for cultivating serenity: favorable place, correct understanding of the instructions for cultivating serenity, freedom from coarse desires, contentment, minimal involvement in worldly activities, and pure ethical conduct.
2. Contemplate why each condition is important.
3. Consider how you can begin to develop these conditions now.

Observed Objects

Because sentient beings have different tendencies and dispositions, the Buddha described several objects that could be the observed object (*ālambana*) for cultivating serenity. In general, any object, internal or external, can be used, even a pebble or a candle. However, this physical thing itself is not the object used to develop serenity; the conceptual appearance of it in our mind is, because serenity is developed with the mental consciousness, not the sense consciousnesses.

Staring at a candle will not lead to serenity because this is done with the visual consciousness, which, unlike the mental consciousness, is not a stable consciousness and does not always function. Staring at an external object may drive away discursive thoughts, but this quality alone does not constitute serenity. However, we may gain familiarity with the object by looking at it with our visual consciousness, and then lower our eyes and meditate on it with the mental consciousness. The internal image — the conceptual appearance of the candle in our mind — is the observed object upon which we develop serenity.

The Buddha spoke of four main categories of observed objects for meditation: (1) extensive objects, (2) objects for purifying behavior, (3) objects of expertise, and (4) objects for purifying afflictions. Understanding the purpose and benefits of these various

meditation objects, we will choose one of them, not a candle or a flower, as our object of meditation.

Extensive Objects

Extensive objects are so called because they are used for the development of both serenity and insight. They are of four types:

1. *Analytical images* are observed by insight that analyzes its object.
2. *Nonanalytical images* are observed by serenity that focuses on the object without analyzing it. Analytical and nonanalytical images are posited in terms of how the mind observes the object. They are conceptual appearances of the object, which may be the five objects for purifying behavior, the objects of expertise, and objects for purifying afflictions.
3. *The limits of existence* refers to the extent of phenomena and are posited in terms of the observed object. The *limits for the diversity of phenomena* means phenomena must be either permanent or impermanent — that is the limit of what they can be. The five aggregates are the limit of what impermanent phenomena can be; if it is impermanent, it must belong to one of the five aggregates. The four truths are the limit of what is to be known. The *limits for the nature of phenomena* means reason establishes the truth of those meditation objects. Upon reaching an understanding of the limit of a phenomenon, we fix our mindfulness on it with stabilizing meditation.
4. *The purpose we seek to accomplish* is posited in terms of the result and refers to gaining the fruit of serenity and insight.

Objects for Purifying Behavior

Meditation on an object for purifying behavior helps those whose behavior is dominated by a specific affliction to pacify that

affliction. The affliction is one that we have become familiar with over many lifetimes and is now prominent in our mind. Five objects for purifying behavior are taught according to the affliction that disturbs our mind the most.

1. To counteract strong desire, we concentrate on the ugly aspect of the person or thing to which we are attached. The meditation on the body to counteract sexual desire is an example of this. To investigate whether the body is attractive, we examine the different parts of the body — liver, muscles, blood, and so on — or the body as a corpse. When the aspect of its foulness appears, we concentrate on that.

2. To subdue strong anger, resentment, and animosity, we cultivate serenity on the experience of love, wishing friends, strangers, and enemies to have happiness and its causes.

3. When suffering from confusion, we meditate on the twelve links, the dependent process through which cyclic existence arises. Seeing that there is no person who creates causes and experiences results or who cycles in saṃsāra, we cultivate serenity on that.

4. To purify conceit, we concentrate on the five mental and physical aggregates, the twelve sources, and the eighteen constituents. Focusing on these components dissolves the conceit of being a self separate from its parts. Because the detail and diversity of these things are difficult to understand, our conceit will decrease.

5. To pacify distracting and discursive thoughts, we meditate on the breath by observing inhalation and exhalation, with or without counting the breaths.

Objects of Expertise

Objects of expertise are so called because becoming skilled or knowledgeable about them refutes a personal self and facilitates

realizing emptiness. Meditation on any of the sets of objects below increases concentration as well as wisdom.

1. Knowledgeable about the *five aggregates*, we know that the I and mine do not exist separate from the aggregates.
2. With knowledge about the *eighteen constituents*, we understand that they arise dependent on their respective causes and conditions.
3. Skill in the *twelve sources* is knowing that the six external sources are the object conditions of consciousness; the six internal sources are dominant conditions of consciousness; and the immediately preceding consciousness, which is included in the mental source, is the immediately preceding condition of the six consciousnesses.[48]
4. Knowledge of the *twelve links of dependent origination* entails realizing impermanence, duḥkha, and selflessness in relation to the twelve links.
5. Knowing *appropriate and inappropriate results* is understanding that it is appropriate for fortunate ripening results to arise from virtue but not from nonvirtue.

Objects for Purifying Afflictions

Objects for purifying afflictions are general antidotes to afflictions and help us to purify coarse and subtle afflictions of the desire, form, and formless realms by temporarily suppressing them with concentration and then cutting their root with wisdom. To temporarily suppress afflictions, the meditation object is the coarseness of the lower levels of meditative absorptions and the peacefulness of the higher levels. This is done to gain progressively higher levels of meditative absorption in the form and formless realms. For example, someone who has attained the first dhyāna and seeks to attain the second dhyāna contemplates the first dhyāna as coarse and the second as peaceful. Through this, she will suppress the afflictions associated with the first dhyāna and attain the concentration of the second dhyāna.

Cutting the root of afflictions is done by meditating on the sixteen attributes of the four truths: impermanence and so forth. Combining serenity with insight into these sixteen leads to attaining the ārya paths and liberation.

In addition to the four main categories of observed objects taught by the Buddha to cultivate serenity, other objects may be used with success.

The Conventional Nature of the Mind

The conventional nature of the mind may be the observed object. Here we focus on the mere clarity (luminosity) and cognizance (awareness) that is the mind. The expression "mind focuses on mind" does not mean that a single instance of mind looks at itself. Rather, one moment of mind focuses on the immediately preceding moment of mind. To do this requires understanding the mind's nature and being able to identify the mind.

The mind resembles a crystal. When a crystal is placed on a colored cloth, the color of the cloth is evident and prominent, but the clarity of the crystal is obscured. When the crystal is removed from the colored cloth, its own quality of clarity can be perceived. Similarly, when the mind is distracted toward external objects and internal conceptualizations, its own clear and cognizant nature is obscured, but when it can be seen alone, its qualities of clarity (that reflects objects by arising in their aspect) and of cognizance (that knows objects) become evident. Words alone cannot give us the full flavor of clarity and cognizance; to know them we must identify and experience them ourselves.

Identifying the mind is not easy, as it is usually directed outward to sense objects or inward toward feelings of happiness and pain. The mind is covered by layers of conceptions: thoughts and emotions, hopes and fears about the past and the future, all of which obscure its clear and cognizant nature. To perceive the mind, we need to peel away these layers, "capture" the clear and cognizant nature of the mind, and stabilize our attention on it. The mind needs to become familiar with staying in the present; then we will be able to see the true face of our mind.

To identify the mind, look at an object with a muted, uniform color. Gaze at it, but focus on the mind that is perceiving it. Maintain a strong determination to maintain your focus on the mind without being distracted. When your mindfulness is strong, you will be able to immediately identify when the mind is distracted by an external object such as a sound or an internal object such as a thought or feeling. By immediately identifying distractions as they arise and withdrawing your attention from them, return your focus to the perceiving mind. Gradually these obscurations will cease and you will perceive a stable, lucid state of mind.

When the mind is able to remain in the present, undisturbed by thoughts of the past and the future, you may experience a vacuum. This is not the emptiness that is the ultimate truth, but an absence of the solidity you are accustomed to. This experience of a vacuum arises because you are so habituated to external objects that when you remove your mind from them and stay in the present, you feel there is a vacuum, an absence. As you continually increase the duration of this experience, you will have a glimpse of the clear and cognizant nature of the mind. That is, within the experience of the absence of sense stimuli, gradually the clarity and cognizance of the mind become more obvious. This is the conventional mind that is an object of meditation for developing serenity.

At first you will be able to identify and remain focused on the clear and aware nature of mind for only a short while. However, as you continue to practice, this time will be extended. You will begin to see that the mind is like a mirror or like totally clear and still water. Objects can appear and disappear without disturbing the medium in which they arise. Noticing this, you will be able to observe your thoughts and perceptions without getting hooked by them. They will arise and pass away without ruffling the stillness of the mind.

If your attention flags, remember a happy or a suffering experience, and without indulging in these feelings, use them to clearly identify the mind and then return your concentration to the conventional nature of the mind.

The challenge with using the mind as the observed object is that because it lacks form, we can easily slip into meditating on a mere conception of the lack of materiality. We may also fall into blank-minded meditation on nothingness. In both cases we have lost the object of meditation. We may think we are meditating on the mind, but we are not. Longchen Rabjampa speaks of this in his Dzogchen writings and advises that to remedy it practitioners purify the seeds of destructive karma, accumulate merit, study the teachings, and practice under the guidance of a qualified spiritual mentor.

Emptiness

Some people prefer to use emptiness — the lack of inherent existence — as their observed object for cultivating serenity. This is called "seeking meditation on the basis of the view" and is possible only for practitioners with exceptionally sharp aptitude who have realized emptiness through reliable inference. Temporarily forsaking analysis on the ultimate mode of existence, they concentrate on a conceptual understanding of it.

The danger here is that if you lack clear ascertainment of emptiness, your focus on it may weaken, and you may meditate on nothingness instead. For this reason, most spiritual mentors recommend "seeking the view on the basis of meditation" and encourage first using the image of the Buddha or another object to gain serenity and then look to attain a stable inferential realization of emptiness.

The Buddha

In his *Stages of Meditation*, Kamalaśīla spoke of the image of the Buddha as the meditation object for cultivating serenity. He based this on the *Sūtra on the Concentration That Perceives the Buddha of the Present Face to Face* (*Pratyutpanna-buddha-saṃmukhāvasthita-samādhi Sūtra*) and the *King of Concentration Sūtra* (*Samādhirāja Sūtra*).

Developing deep familiarity with the image of the Buddha has many advantages: We can easily recollect the Buddha's qualities, which is especially helpful at the time of death. Our refuge will deepen, inspiring our mind. We will create merit, which contributes to the attainment of a buddha's form body. Other practices such as making offerings and prostrations to the field of merit will become more alive. This also prepares us for tantric practice in which we imagine ourselves as deities and our environment as the deity's maṇḍala and concentrate single-pointedly on that.

To do this meditation, look at a photo or statue of Śākyamuni Buddha or reflect on an eloquent description of him. Then lower your eyes and visualize the Buddha as a three-dimensional living being in the space in front of you. Seated on a throne, lotus, and flat cushions of the sun and moon, his body is made of brilliant golden light. Imagining a small figure makes the mind more alert, visualizing it being very bright opposes laxity, and imagining it to be dense or heavy prevents restlessness and scattering.

To begin, mentally recollect the basic features of the Buddha's form — his head, torso, arms, legs, and so on. Then focus single-pointedly on his body as a whole. If it is not completely clear, which it certainly won't be in the early stages, that is fine. Simply focus your attention on it, even if it is just a general golden shape. When the image fades, review the features of his body once again and then sustain your concentration on the entire form. If some parts of the Buddha's body appear clearly, focus on them, and if they fade, return your attention to the entire body.

Do not insist on trying to visualize every detail clearly before concentrating on the image of the Buddha. Doing so interferes with stable concentration. However, if you develop concentration on the image that appears, the mind will settle down and clarity will develop. People are different: for some the image appears easily, for others it does not. Some people have a clear image, others do not. Some people have a stable image, others do not. Regardless, we must continue meditating.

Sometimes instead of a golden body his body may appear to be another color, or instead of a seated Buddha the image of a

standing Buddha will appear. Do not follow these distortions but bring your attention back to your original meditation object. Apply the techniques described below to eliminate the various hindrances and faults that may arise.

REFLECTION

1. Recall the benefits of developing concentration on the image of the Buddha: it deepens your refuge in the Three Jewels, brings mindfulness of the Buddha's excellent qualities, and plants imprints on your mindstream to be able to think of the Buddha when you die.
2. After looking at a statue or painting of the Buddha, lower your eyes and visualize the Buddha with his body of golden light in the space in front of you.
3. Go over the details and then focus on the Buddha's body as a whole, being satisfied with however clear the image may be.
4. When the image becomes fuzzy, review the details again and then focus again on the whole image.
5. If distractions arise, renew your mindfulness of the Buddha. If lethargy arises, apply the antidotes to energize the mind.

The Breath

The breath is a good meditation object, especially for beginners, and can be effective for attaining serenity. It is not as subtle as the mind and not as gross as an external object. Some meditators have told me that when they focus on the breath for a while, the mind becomes very still and settled. Breathing meditation is helpful to calm the mind when it gets excited or upset in daily life. The stillness it brings enables the mind to take a rest and have some respite from the afflictions. Nevertheless, a more lasting and powerful approach to subduing the afflictions is to reflect on dependent arising, emptiness, and the benefits of bodhicitta.

Observed Objects in Tantra

Some people prefer to generate serenity during tantric practice, using the image of themselves as a deity or a syllable visualized at a specific point in the deity's body as the observed object. This is fine,

although some masters advise developing serenity on one of the objects mentioned in Sūtrayāna first because they consider serenity as preliminary to tantra. Meditating on the deity's body has the additional benefits of counteracting ordinary appearance and ordinary grasping. For those practicing the three lower tantras, serenity is attained during the yoga with signs; for those practicing highest yoga tantra, it is attained during the generation stage. The method for developing serenity by pacifying the five hindrances, eliminating the five faults, cultivating the eight antidotes, and so forth is the same as in Sūtrayāna.

To use the image of yourself as a deity as the meditation object involves receiving tantric empowerment. During the sādhana practice, meditate on emptiness and dissolve your polluted body into emptiness. Then think that the mind understanding emptiness appears as the deity with a divine body made of light. Establish divine identity of yourself as the deity. Then review the features of the deity's body and focus single-pointedly on the general image.

Other Objects

Bodhibhadra, a master at Nālandā and one of Atiśa's spiritual mentors, set out a variety of meditation objects to develop serenity in his *Chapter on the Collections of Concentration* (*Samādhi-sambhāra-parivarta*). To outline them (LC 3:38):

1. Serenity attained by looking inward
    a. Focusing on the body
        - Focusing on the body itself in the aspect of a deity
        - Focusing on the body as foul, for example as a skeleton
        - Focusing on a special syllable or implement of a deity
    b. Focusing on what is based on the body
        - Focusing on the breath

- Focusing on a subtle divine syllable
- Focusing on the subtle drops in the body
- Focusing on the aspects of light rays
- Focusing on joy and bliss

2. Serenity based on an object of meditation
    a. Special
        - Focusing on a deity's body
        - Focusing on a deity's speech
    b. Common

Choosing Our Meditation Object

The choice of object for serenity meditation depends on our disposition, faculties, and proclivity toward one object or another. For example, people who have asthma or allergies find focusing on the breath difficult. They prefer a visualized image or another object. People who can visualize easily may prefer to use a visualized image of the Buddha as their observed object. It is wise to consult with your spiritual mentor when choosing the meditation object, but once you have chosen an object, do not keep changing it.

Many benefits are derived from choosing a meditation object that helps familiarize your mind with virtue. Noting this, Tsongkhapa cautions (LC 3:38):

> Since you must achieve concentration using an object of serenity that has a particular purpose, those who achieve concentration using things like pebbles and twigs for objects of meditation are clearly ignorant of the teachings on objects of concentration.

Serenity is a practice of Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike; concentration is necessary to gain deeper understanding no matter which spiritual tradition we practice. Our Christian, Jewish, Hindu, and Muslim brothers and sisters may choose a meditation

object from their own tradition as the observed object — the image of Christ, the star of David or a Hebrew letter, a Hindu deity, or an Islamic symbol — and apply the instructions described below to develop serenity.

Those from other faiths may also do analytical meditation. For instance, they could practice both stabilizing and analytical meditation to develop faith in God or to generate love for their fellow human beings. At an interfaith conference at Gethsemani, the late Thomas Merton's monastery in Kentucky, United States, I described how to gain serenity. The participants were sincere practitioners of their own faiths, and these teachings undoubtedly benefited them.

Structuring the Meditation Session

A realistic attitude free from grandiose expectations of quick results is important when cultivating serenity. Unbroken continuity in our practice is also necessary. If we meditate for many hours one day and then not at all for three days, the benefit of cumulative practice will elude us.

For the first session each day, do all six preparatory practices described in chapter 6 of *The Foundation of Buddhist Practice*. Place an image of the Buddha on a table in front of you, make many offerings, and generate bodhicitta, thinking that you will develop serenity in order to attain full awakening for the benefit of all sentient beings. Sit in the seven-point position of Buddha Vairocana. This position straightens the internal, subtle energy channels, allowing the winds or qi to flow smoothly.[49] This, in turn, makes the mind calmer. Sitting in this position facilitates concentration and establishes auspicious predispositions to attain a buddha's form body. Be sure to cultivate a bodhicitta motivation and observe your breath for a few minutes to calm the mind before focusing on your chosen meditation object.

For the remaining sessions begin with taking refuge in the Three Jewels and generating bodhicitta. Then contemplate the seven limbs to purify negativities and create merit, and request your

spiritual mentors for inspiration so your meditation session will bear the desired fruits. Always dedicate the merit at the conclusion of each session.

In retreat or in daily practice, short meditation sessions are recommended to develop serenity. Pushing yourself to do long sessions is counterproductive. It makes the mind tight, so that instead of looking forward to meditating you will put it off, whereas if you are content at the conclusion of a session you will be happy to meditate later. As the mind becomes more stable, gradually increase the length of the sessions. Although cultivating serenity may be difficult at first, as you progress you will experience its benefits and meditation will become easier.

When cultivating serenity, meditation masters recommend having many meditation sessions each day. In each have several mini-sessions; initially meditate for five minutes, then take a short break during which you open your eyes and relax for a minute. Then do another five-minute session followed by another short break. Remain seated during the short breaks, but stretch your legs if necessary. Continue like this for the duration of the session. As your stability on the object increases, have fewer, but longer, mini-sessions. If suitable, you can eventually do four sessions each day in retreat setting. When cultivating serenity as part of your daily practice, your session may be fifteen to thirty minutes total.

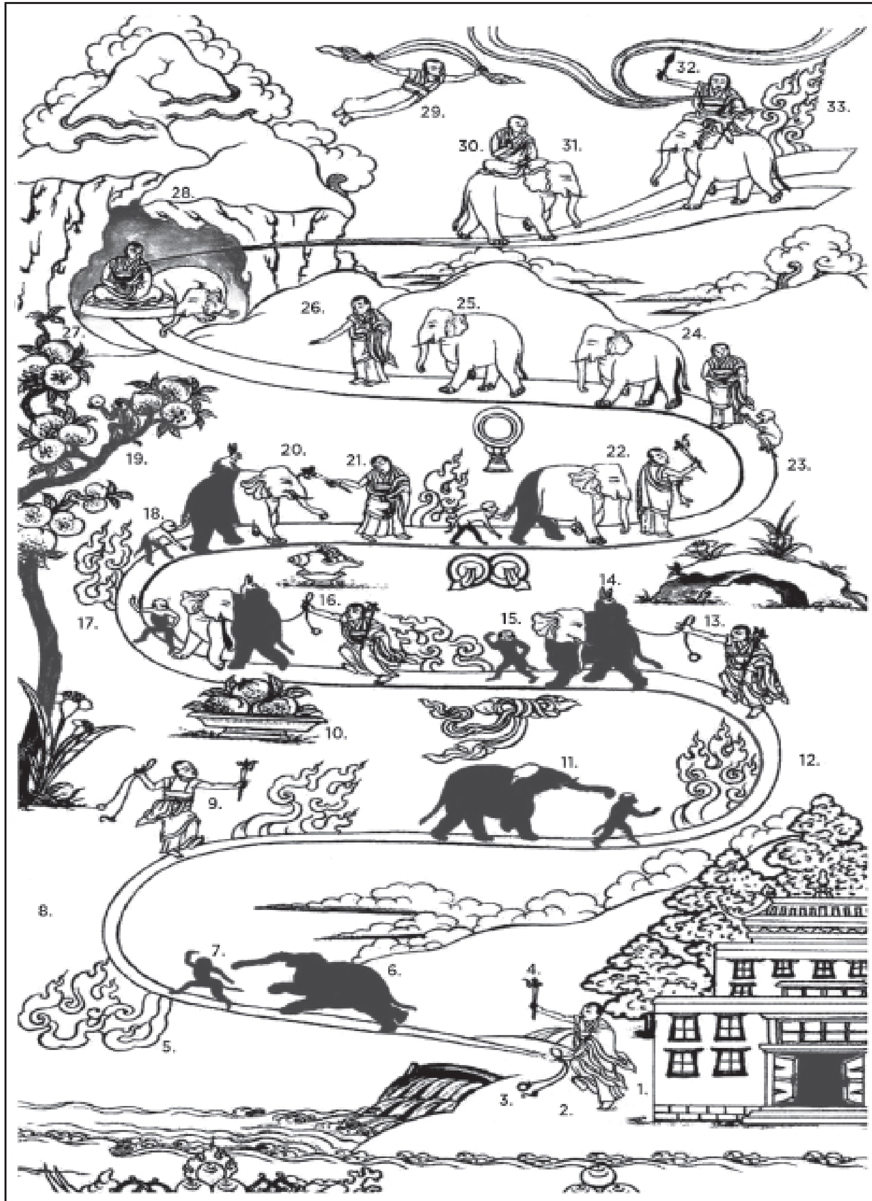
Working with the Body

When we begin meditating, our body may be very restless. We fidget, trying to find that elusive comfortable position. We try using different cushions or putting them in different places. We may sit on a bench with our legs underneath it, or sit on a chair. Although sometimes we are successful in finding a comfortable position, at other times no matter what we do the body isn't comfortable.

This in part is due to our body being unfamiliar with the meditation posture. Doing yoga, tai chi, qigong, or other exercises are effective for stretching the body and calming its energy.

Keeping our body fit and healthy is important for meditation. Sometimes the physical restlessness is related to mental restlessness: our habituation with seeking distraction, craving for new and exciting experiences, or addiction to pleasurable feelings and the activities that bring them. We begin to notice that the stress in our mind and tightness in our body affect and amplify each other. Those of us who never thought of ourselves as being particularly anxious may discover that, in fact, we have a lot of anxiety and this makes sitting calmly in meditation a challenge.

Śāntideva said that there is nothing that does not become easier with practice, so we must persevere without pushing ourselves or holding unrealistic expectations. If we do so, gradually our body will get used to the meditation posture and tension will disperse.



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7 | Obstacles and Antidotes

LEARNING THE METHOD to attain serenity is a precious opportunity, even if we are unable to implement every facet of it at this moment. We employ whatever we can in our daily practice, gradually increasing our ability to concentrate. When possible, we do long or short retreats. Studying and applying these teachings enables us to practice properly and to deal with the various hindrances that everyone experiences at one time or another while meditating. These instructions are detailed, and it is worthwhile to study them well.

The Five Hindrances

When we meditate, distracting thoughts and afflictions easily arise in the minds of us ordinary beings. As our introspective awareness improves, we notice these more; memories of the past, plans for the future, objects of attachment, and images of people and situations we dislike pass through our mind. Some may think meditation is making them more distracted, but in fact this jumble of thoughts has been going on for a long time and only now are we noticing it. These thoughts and images impact us — affecting our outlook, moods, self-confidence, and behavior — even though we may not register them at the moment.

Because distracting thoughts are so pervasive, Asaṅga strongly advises that before we seriously endeavor to cultivate serenity, we direct our meditation toward subduing whichever affliction is strongest so that it does not repeatedly interrupt our meditation. Meditating on the objects for purifying behavior helps this. Becoming acquainted with the five hindrances and developing skill in their antidotes is also essential. This will make our mind more malleable and improve our ethical conduct and psychological well-being. With a more virtuous and focused mind, concentration, bodhicitta, and wisdom can grow.

The Pāli, Tibetan, and Chinese Buddhist traditions all speak of five hindrances (*nīvaraṇa*) that interfere with the cultivation of concentration: (1) sensual desire (*kāmacchanda*), (2) malice (*vyāpāda*,

byāpāda), (3) lethargy and sleepiness (*styāna-middha*, *thīna-middha*), (4) restlessness and regret (*auddhatya-kaukṛtya*, *uddhacca-kukkucca*), and (5) deluded doubt (*vicikitsā*, *vicikicchā*). The explanation below is an amalgamation of instructions from these three traditions that come to the same point. It includes citations from Pāli scriptures, citations from Nāgārjuna's *Commentary to the Great Perfection of Wisdom* found in the Chinese canon,[50] and meditations from Vasubandhu's *Treasury of Knowledge* (*Abhidharmakośa*) and its *Autocommentary* (*Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣyam*) in the Tibetan canon.

Although the five hindrances are separate mental factors, separating one from the other in practice is not always easy because they arise in close proximity to one another. For example, we perceive or think about a pleasing person and sensual desire arises. But soon after, the same person becomes annoying and malice arises. This occurs because the craving and delight affiliated with sensual desire are also the cause for aversion and malice. These emotions are not unrelated.

The five hindrances obstruct the mind from abiding calmly and stably on the meditation object. It is the work of samādhi to clear these hindrances and calm the proliferations of thoughts and moods. To overcome them, we must see them clearly and then apply the antidotes.

Sensual Desire

Sensual desire is attachment for objects of the desire realm, be they material — such as money, possessions, or food — or social — such as approval, praise, and reputation. Sensual desire is the hallmark of most societies; we are consumed with wanting more or better, and our minds are filled with plans and images of everything we believe will bring us happiness.

Sexual desire is human beings' strongest desire, and modern culture extols it. From childhood, we have been exposed to sexual images and have received the message that a large part of our worth as human beings is being sexually attractive. In addition to the natural desire that our bodies have as biological organisms, our self-esteem becomes wrapped up in our appearance and sexuality. This overemphasis on sex is psychologically unhealthy.

While pleasure itself is not "bad," attachment to it diverts our mind from spiritual practice. We can spend an entire meditation session lost

in fantasies of sensual desire. When this desire manifests, we often feel compelled to fulfill it, no matter what. This leads us to make impulsive decisions that often create destructive karma and bring problems down on us. Remembering the impermanent and unsatisfactory nature of the desirable object or person is helpful to subdue the urge to grasp it in order to fill the void, boredom, or loneliness inside of us. Nāgārjuna said in *Commentary to the Great Perfection of Wisdom* (NSP 635–36):

> Desire is the net of the demons and an entangling web from which it is difficult to escape. Desire constitutes a burning heat which dries up all bliss… . Desire, like drawing close to a fiery pit, is extremely fearsome. It is like cornering a venomous snake, like an enemy invader brandishing a knife, like swallowing molten copper … like a lion blocking one's path. All desires are just like this and are worthy of being feared. Desires cause people to undergo torment and suffering.
>
> Those people who are attached to desire are like convicts in a prison, like a deer caught in a corral-trap, like birds snared in a net, like fish who have swallowed a hook … like a crow in the midst of a band of owls… . Desires are like blind men approaching an abyss, like a fly caught in hot oil, like a peaceful man caught up in military combat, like one who had entered a river of boiling brine, like one who licks a honey-smeared blade.

When our mind becomes overwhelmed with sensual desire, an excellent antidote is contemplating the foul nature of the body — our own and others' — to calm lust and craving. In chapter 8 of *Engaging in the Bodhisattvas' Deeds*, Śāntideva presents the body to us as it actually is, exposing the senselessness of lust. Meditating on these verses, as well as analyzing the parts of the body in meditation, are effective methods for counteracting sexual attachment.

Malice

Malice, the wish to give harm, may arise toward many objects — a particular person, physical pain or mental anguish, loneliness, conflicting ideas, political figures, sounds, or whatever else meets with our disapproval. Malice is an unpleasant state that makes us vengeful,

cynical, and fearful, but it is one that we may be familiar with, one that distracts us from using our human potential to do good.

Malice causes our actions to contradict Dharma advice and, as a result, we fall to unfortunate rebirths. It is likened to a thief that steals our virtue and a storehouse filled with all types of harsh speech. If malice arises while we sit in meditation, we may spend the entire session ruminating on the harms done to us, such that any concentration — except on the object of our anger — becomes impossible. Nāgārjuna quotes Śakra, the king of the devas, asking the Buddha (NSP 391):

> What thing is it which, killed, brings peace and security?
>
> What thing is it which, slain, one has no regrets?
>
> What thing is it which is the root of venomousness?
>
> And which devours and destroys all forms of goodness?
>
> What thing is it which one slays and then one is praised?
>
> What thing is it which, slain, brings one no more distress?

The Buddha replies:

> If one kills anger, the mind will be peaceful and secure.
>
> If one slays anger, the mind will have no regrets.
>
> It is anger which is the root of venomousness.
>
> It is anger which destroys all forms of goodness.
>
> If one slays anger, all buddhas offer praise.
>
> If one slays anger, one has no more distress.

Recognizing the disadvantages of anger and malice, turn your mind to the kindness of others. Releasing the judgmental, vengeful attitude, cultivate forgiveness and love. Our meditation on love should be personal. It is not difficult to wish well to an amorphous group of sentient beings suffering on the other side of the world. But wishing specific individuals to have happiness and its causes — especially those we know who have different political opinions or who have harmed us or our dear ones — can be more challenging. Begin the meditation with individuals and gradually radiate love to all beings everywhere.

Lethargy and Sleepiness

Lethargy manifests physically as lacking physical energy and stamina and mentally as mental heaviness; the mind is dull, unclear, and lacks energy. We feel bored and don't want to exert the energy to be interested in anything. This may occur because the mind is mired in negativity or exhausted by too much emotion.

Sleepiness is drowsiness; the five sense faculties have withdrawn and we may even nod off in meditation.

Lethargy and sleepiness are distinct mental factors but are explained together because they have the same cause, function, and antidote. They are caused by five factors: bad dreams, mental unhappiness, physical exhaustion, unbalanced food consumption, and depression. Both function to make the body and mind dull and are counteracted by a bright, alert mind.

From one perspective, lethargy and sleepiness are more problematic than other hindrances in that other hindrances can often be dispelled simply by recognizing them, whereas the mind is totally clouded over and unaware when lethargy and sleepiness reign. Nāgārjuna says that the buddhas and bodhisattvas admonish their indolent disciples by reminding us of the faults of saṃsāra and urging us to wake up immediately and follow the path to liberation (NSP 629):

> You! Get up! Don't lie there hugging that stinking corpse
>
> that is all sorts of impurities falsely designated as a "person."
>
> It's as if you've gotten a serious disease or been shot by an arrow.
>
> With such an accumulation of suffering and pain, how can you sleep?
>
> The entire world is burning up by the fire of death.
>
> You should be seeking means of escape. How then can you sleep?
>
> You're like a person in shackles being led to his execution.
>
> With disastrous harm so imminent, how can you sleep?
>
> With insurgent fetters not yet destroyed and their harm not yet averted,

it's as if you were sleeping in a room with a venomous snake

and as if you have met up with the soldiers' gleaming blades.

At such a time, how can you sleep?

Sleep is a vast darkness in which nothing is visible.

Every day it deceives and steals away your clarity.

When sleep blankets the mind, you are not aware of anything.

With such great faults as these, how can you sleep?

While sitting in meditation, you may notice that the mind can be restless one moment and drowsy the next. This indicates that lethargy and sleepiness are not necessarily signs of physical fatigue or lack of sleep. They are often a way that ignorance and resistance sabotage your attempts to meditate. Sometimes they occur as a result of destructive karma created in the past: we may have avoided the Dharma or treated holy beings and holy objects disrespectfully. Making prostrations together with the four opponent powers before we sit in meditation is an excellent way to invigorate the body while purifying karmic obstacles. This may be done in conjunction with reciting "A Bodhisattva's Confession of Ethical Downfalls." While prostrating, imagine brilliant light from the Buddha filling your body-mind, dispelling physical and mental heaviness and uplifting your mental energy. While doing breathing meditation, imagine inhaling bright light with each breath and exhaling dullness in the form of smoke that vanishes in space. Remembering impermanence is also effective, as is contemplating uplifting topics, such as the qualities of the Three Jewels, the preciousness of your human life, and the rare opportunity you possess to cultivate wonderful spiritual qualities.

Chinese monasteries have wake-up devices that some monastics use. One is a piece of wood attached to the meditator's ear with a string. If he nods off, it falls and pulls the ear. Another is a stick that when hit on an acupressure point on a meditator's back makes a cracking sound that rouses the person.

During break times, look long distances, and look at the stars and the moon at night to enlarge your mental scope. Make the meditation room cooler or remove your sweater, and avoid overeating. Splash cold water on your face before the session.

Restlessness and Regret

Restlessness and regret are separate mental factors that are combined as one hindrance because they have the same cause, function, and antidote. Both arise due to preconceptions that remember our relatives, friends, home, previous good times, and loving companions. Both function to make the mind unsettled, and both lack calm. Serenity is their antidote.

Restlessness is mental agitation that includes anxiety, fear, apprehension, excitement, and worry. An incessant flow of thoughts bounce from one topic to another. Restlessness is of three types: physically restless, we jump from one activity to another aimlessly; verbally restless, we get caught up in singing, chatting, arguing over trivial topics, and discussing worldly affairs; mentally restless, we are filled with distractions and discursive thoughts. Restlessness is likened to an unrestrained drunken elephant and a camel without a nose ring; both are nearly impossible to control. For these reasons, rather than allow restlessness to continue unabated, we must recognize it and then deliberately calm body, speech, and mind so that they will be undisturbed and more manageable.

Regret is an uncomfortable feeling that we did something we should not have done or did not do something we should have done. Regret is of two types. (1) We spend time and energy in useless activities. When we realize how much time we have wasted, we feel remorse and worry that we'll never be able to meditate properly. (2) After engaging in serious destructive karma, we feel overwhelmed with guilt and self-reproach. Although regretting our misdeeds is virtuous, here the mind is unclear and falls into unproductive and exaggerated guilt.

Both restlessness and regret take us into the past, longing for pleasures long gone or worrying and guilty about actions done or not done. Both also take us into the future, restlessness planning pleasurable experiences, regret anxious about what could go wrong. Our thoughts are immersed in events that are not happening now.

Observing our breath is one antidote to the flurry of agitated and remorseful thoughts. Mindfulness of the movements of the body helps to return attention to the present. Paying attention to our present physical, verbal, and mental activities alleviates fears about the future

and remorse about the past. We discover that the present is agreeable and full of opportunities to create virtue.

Guilt is especially useless; it draws us into self-preoccupation in a most unhealthy way. Nāgārjuna counsels (NSP 631):

> If you feel regret for an offense,
>
> having regretted it, put it down and let it go.
>
> In this way, the mind abides peaceful and happy.
>
> Do not constantly remain attached to it in your thoughts.
>
> If you possess the two kinds of regret,
>
> of having not done what you should have done, or having done what you should not have done,
>
> because this regret attaches to the mind,
>
> it is the mark of a foolish person.
>
> It is not the case that, on account of feeling guilty,
>
> you will somehow be able to do what you failed to do.
>
> All of the ill deeds that you have already committed
>
> cannot be caused to become undone.

Generating the type of regret involved in purification is useful. Having sincerely performed the four opponent powers, we can release self-reproach and guilt.

Deluded Doubt

Doubt is indecisiveness. One type of doubt involves seeking answers to genuine questions we have about the path or the meditation technique. That doubt invites curiosity and can usually be cleared up by consulting our spiritual mentor or a knowledgeable Dharma friend.

Another type of doubt — a useless spinning of thoughts — is deluded. We have so many options to choose from that we get caught in doubt: Should I go to this Dharma center or that one? Should I rely on this teacher or that one? Should I ordain? Am I doing this meditation correctly? How long should my meditation sessions be? We may doubt our abilities or doubt that it is possible to actualize our

spiritual goals. We are mired in the quicksand of indecision and confusion.

Deluded doubt specifically concerns Dharma teachings: It seems that rebirth doesn't exist. I'm not sure but it sounds like emptiness means nothing exists. Is it really possible to become a buddha? Isn't that just fantasy and wishful thinking?

Appearing so real and important, doubt immobilizes us. It's like trying to sew with a two-pointed needle: we can't go this way; we can't go that way. Deluded doubt inhibits generating the faith and confidence in the Three Jewels that makes our minds receptive to learning and practicing the Dharma. As a result, even if we meet the Buddhadharma and encounter an excellent spiritual mentor, the benefit we receive from them is lost to us. We resemble someone who goes to a land of great wealth, but lacking a bag, is unable to take anything away with him.

While not all forms of doubt inhibit gaining serenity, three foremost ones do:

1. Doubt in ourselves prevents us from trying: I'm not capable of this; my intelligence is limited and the defilements and seeds of destructive karma obscuring my mind are too great. Such unrealistic self-denigrating thoughts paralyze. The opportunity to act to improve our situation — especially by employing the mind-training methods — is always present.

2. Doubt in our spiritual mentor arises from looking only at his or her superficial characteristics with a judgmental attitude: My spiritual mentor's behavior is nothing special. He or she doesn't have any realizations of the path, so what will I gain from following him? Considering ourselves wise enough to evaluate our spiritual mentor's practice, we are blind to our own arrogance. To free ourselves from this doubt, Nāgārjuna recommends that we think of gold in a smelly pouch. If we want the gold, we have to take the pouch too. Then, instead of dwelling on the mentor's shortcomings, we reflect that our mentor is instructing us in the Buddha's teachings, just as the Buddha himself would do. Rather than focus on the pouch, we direct our interest to the gold inside.

3. Doubt in the Dharma makes us wonder if buddhahood and the path to attain it exist. Not knowing how to think clearly about the topic, our mind swirls in confusion. We need some patience; it's

unrealistic to think that all our questions must be answered before we can do any Dharma practice at all. By practicing what we understand, we increase our respect in the teachings and open our minds to understanding other topics. Nāgārjuna advises (NSP 631):

> Just as when a person stands at a fork in the road
>
> and is so confused by doubt that he goes nowhere at all,
>
> [when you seek realization of] the true character of phenomena,
>
> doubt acts in just the same way.
>
> Because you remain doubtful, you don't diligently seek
>
> [to realize] the true character of phenomena [*dharmatā*].
>
> This doubt comes forth from confusion.
>
> Among all the detrimental [mental factors], it is the worst …
>
> Although you may possess doubts while abiding in the world,
>
> you should still accord with the sublime and virtuous Dharma.
>
> Just as when you contemplate a fork in the road,
>
> you should follow that path which is most beneficial.

The five hindrances are subsumed in the three poisons and are related to the 84,000 afflictions. The hindrance of sensual desire is the poison of attachment, the hindrance of malice is the poison of anger, the hindrances of lethargy and sleepiness and doubt are the poison of confusion, and the hindrance of restlessness and regret is based on all three poisons. These four categories — attachment, anger, confusion, and all three — each subsume 21,000 afflictions, for a total of 84,000. By applying antidotes to three poisons and five hindrances, all afflictions are overcome.

Zhiyi says that a practitioner who has successfully suppressed these five through serenity is like a person who has recovered from a threatening disease, a famished person arriving in a land of plenty, and a hostage being released from terrorists. Her mind is peaceful, responsive, clear, and blissful. Suppressing afflictions through serenity

gives us temporary respite; only insight into emptiness will eradicate the hindrances forever.

REFLECTION

Review the five hindrances and for each one contemplate:

1. What is the meaning of this hindrance?
2. How does it interrupt concentration?
3. Pinpoint examples of it in your own experience. Which of the five is most troublesome for you?

Taming the Five Hindrances

Although we may think that we are the only ones in the meditation hall who are distracted while everyone else abides in blissful samādhi, we are not alone in having difficulty concentrating. Everyone must deal with the same hindrances in meditation. The hindrances may manifest as images in the mind, ruminating thoughts, or powerful emotions. When a hindrance is not so strong, simply returning the mind to the object of meditation and renewing our mindfulness is sufficient. But when it is strong, we must temporarily leave the object of meditation and reflect on another topic to counteract the hindrance and bring the mind back to a balanced state. In the *Discourse on the Removal of Distracting Thoughts* (MN 20), the Buddha taught five methods for doing this. In sequence they are:

1. Pay attention to a virtuous object. Precisely contemplate the opposite of the distracting thought or emotion.
    - For attachment to material possessions, contemplate impermanence.
    - For sexual desire, contemplate the parts of the body.
    - For anger, hatred, and resentment toward sentient beings, contemplate love.
    - For anger at inanimate things, analyze their components — the four elements (earth, water, fire, and wind).
    - For aversion to situations, contemplate that they are the result of your previous karma and of circumstances that

you do not have control over in this life (such as other people's actions, the weather, and so on).

- For intellectual doubt, study the teachings.
- For emotional doubt, contemplate the qualities of the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha.

2. Examine the danger and disadvantages of those distracting thoughts:
   - They cause your own and others' suffering now and in the future.
   - They obstruct wisdom, cause difficulties on the path, and lead you away from nirvāṇa.
   - Like the carcass of a snake, dog, or human being hanging around your neck, they weigh you down.
3. Do not give attention to those thoughts; ignore them. This resembles turning our head away from something that we do not want to see. In the break time between sessions, engage in an activity that does not allow your attention to go to these thoughts: take a walk, clean the room, paint the figure of the Buddha.
4. Examine the formation of those thoughts. For example:
   - Ask yourself, Why am I thinking this? What are the factors that led to this thought or emotion coming into my mind?
   - From a detached perspective, watch the thoughts flow by until gradually the flow of thoughts quiets down.
5. "Crush mind with mind" — that is, crush the nonvirtuous mental state with a virtuous one.

When we repeatedly apply these counterforces to the hindrances and train the mind in serenity meditation over time, nonvirtuous thoughts will decrease and the mind will become quiet, single-pointed, and concentrated. We will become the master of our own thoughts and will not be subjected to disturbing thoughts. This occurs not through unhealthy psychological repression of thoughts but by learning to work with the mind in a constructive way. By employing these five techniques in the proper circumstances and proper manner, with

practice we will be able to redirect the mind in order to attain the "higher minds" (P. *adhicitta*) — the four dhyānas and four formless absorptions.

Although we ultimately seek nonconceptual realizations, both the Pāli and Sanskrit traditions employ conception in varying ways in the process of developing serenity. For example, in the Pāli tradition the *asubha* meditation on the unattractive nature of the body involves focusing on the conceptual appearances of the various parts of the body. To meditate on love, we reflect on others' kindness and visualize sentient beings around us. The antidote to lethargy is to visualize sunlight filling our body-mind. All these involve conceptual consciousnesses.

Using thought in this way is beneficial in counteracting incorrect ways of thinking, such as proliferating conceptualizations (*prapañca*, *papañca*, T. *spros pa*), a profusion of discursive, ruminating thoughts. These unrealistic thoughts distract the mind and lead it to negativity. Learning to think clearly and in accord with the truth the Buddha taught helps to remedy them.

Meditating on the Body to Counteract Desire

The meditations on the body found in the *Treasury of Knowledge* are presented as antidotes to the sensual desire that interferes with concentration. They can also be done as practices of mindfulness of the body that aid in the cultivation of wisdom. These meditations on the body may initially appear off-putting, but this is precisely why they work to counteract sexual desire. Perhaps the resistance we have to these meditations is that we aren't yet ready to give up enjoyable sensual pleasures!

To do these meditations on the body, examine what the body is, both now when it is alive and later after it has become a corpse and is in various stages of decay. When dissecting sexual attachment, see that it arises in relationship to the body's color, shape, tactile contact, and usefulness. To counteract attachment to the beautiful color of someone's body — the color of their skin, eyes, teeth, and so forth — contemplate that no matter how beautiful his or her body is now, after death it will not be good looking in the least. Imagine it as a corpse: first it will turn a dark-bluish color; as it decays further it will become reddish, and finally it will become a rotten, black corpse. Even when

the person is alive, the color of their body may turn ugly — for example, when bruised or scarred. Open sores, boils, and infected areas are likewise unpleasant to look at.

As an antidote to attachment to the attractive shape of another's body, contemplate its appearance when it is a bloated and swollen corpse. Larger animals and birds eat the flesh and then tear the body apart to gnaw on the bones, destroying its beautiful shape. Even when a person is alive, the shape of their body may be disfigured due to illness or injury.

To counteract attachment to the touch of their body, imagine it as a corpse being devoured by maggots and other insects; just the idea of touching it quickly fades away. Eventually the flesh is consumed, revealing the skeleton; this is hardly a body we want to embrace. Even when alive, the body may be covered with open sores infested with worms. Here in India we see lepers whose flesh has rotted and fallen off, revealing the bone underneath.

The usefulness of another's body refers to the pleasure derived from it. This may be sexual pleasure, pleasure because they serve us, or pleasure from their personality. Here we consider that person almost like an instrument for our own use, enjoyment, and pleasure. As an antidote, meditate on an unmoving corpse or cadaver. It lacks a personality and cannot do anything for us.

As an antidote to all four — color, shape, touch, and usefulness — beginning at the person's forehead or toe, visualize the person's flesh rotting and falling off piece by piece, until only a skeleton remains. Then imagine the same happening to others' bodies, until the entire universe is entirely filled with bones. Alternatively, meditate on the components of the body — the intestines, stomach, muscles, kidneys, spleen, brain, blood, and so on. Whether the body is alive or dead, the color, shape, and touch of its organs are unpleasant. Some people faint when seeing the inside of a body.

Contemplate your own body in a similar way, for one day it will be a rotting corpse or just a pile of ashes if cremated. Meditating on the body as described above causes the mind to become disillusioned with the splendors of saṃsāra. It is less distracted by sensual desire and can more easily be applied to concentration.

Meditating on a Skeleton to Counteract Restlessness

Meditating on your own body as a skeleton makes the mind sober and is a general antidote for restlessness. The following meditations on a skeleton may also work to eliminate laxity because the mind focuses on an object that becomes more and more subtle.

Begin the meditation by focusing at your midbrow and visualize the flesh gradually falling off until only your skeleton remains. The skeleton grows in size and more bones appear until all of space is filled with bones. Concentrate on that for a while, then imagine the bones absorbing one into another until only the room is filled with bones. They absorb further until your skeleton is all that remains. Meditate single-pointedly on this. This is the yoga for beginners.

Once you are able to do the above meditation well, you can move on to the second level, the yoga of thorough training. The process of visualization is similar: begin by focusing on a small piece of exposed bone at your mid-brow and imagine the flesh gradually falling away from the rest of your body until only your skeleton remains. It expands, filling the entire room with bones. More bones appear until the whole environment is brimming with bones. Then narrow the scope of the visualization as before, with the bones gradually absorbing one into another until only your skeleton remains. The skeleton dissolves from the bottom upward until only the upper half of your skull remains. Concentrate on this, fine-tuning the focus of your meditation in this way.

In the third level, the yoga of complete attention, visualize in the same way as before, expanding the range of bones and then withdrawing and absorbing them until only the upper half of the skull remains. Then that dissolves until only a tiny fragment of bone is present at your midbrow. Concentrate on that single-pointedly.[51]

This meditation brings many advantages. First, meditating on the foul aspects of the body subdues attachment and restlessness, which fantasizes about the pleasures we crave. The mind settles, and our attention no longer scatters to objects of attachment. Second, by making our observed object subtler and subtler — first the skeleton, then the upper half of the skull, and finally the bone fragment at the midbrow — we also counteract laxity by increasing the intensity of the clarity of our visualization. These two bring the third advantage, the

ability to concentrate single-pointedly on the chosen object of meditation.

The above meditations on foulness act as antidotes to attachment and restlessness. Although they do not eliminate the seeds of these afflictions from our mindstreams, they reduce their coarse level by preventing their manifesting in our minds. Whether an object is actually attractive or not, our minds are fully capable of fabricating beauty. By reflecting that our own and others' bodies ultimately become bones, we see that there's nothing left to desire but the bones, which are not very attractive. If you wonder if these meditations really work to calm attachment, the way to find out is to do them.

Meditating on the Breath to Counteract Discursive Thought

The Buddha recommended meditation on the breath to overcome discursive thought (*vikalpa*, *vikappa*, T. *rnam rtog*) — mental busyness that hinders our meditation. This meditation, taught by Vasubandhu in *Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣyam*, progresses in six phases. The Chinese master Zhiyi's *Six Dharma Gates to the Sublime*, written in the sixth century, also teaches this meditation. The coming and going of the breath as you exhale and inhale is the observed object.

1. *Counting the breath.* Relax the mind and body. Then breathe comfortably, letting your out and in breaths be equal in speed and strength. Mentally count each cycle of the breath going out and coming in until you reach ten. Don't count more than ten because restlessness may arise from the mind focusing too tightly. If you count less than ten, you may not be able to overcome laxity. Count clearly; don't mix up the numbers or forget them. Avoid confusion over whether you're exhaling or inhaling.

As you exhale, be aware, Now I'm about to breathe out, I'm breathing out, the exhalation is almost finished, the exhalation has finished. When inhaling, think, Now I'm about to breathe in, now I'm breathing in, the inhalation is about to finish, the inhalation has finished.

Even though the instructions are simple, doing this meditation properly with concentration is difficult. If you concentrate well, thoughts will disappear and you will be left with the radiant nature of the mind.

2. *Following the breath*. Breathe slowly and while inhaling follow the breath in. Imagine it going to the throat, heart, navel, thighs, and soles of the feet. Get a sense that the breath pervades the body, which has many channels through which the breath passes. When exhaling, follow the breath as it leaves your body. Imagine it goes a short distance outside your nostrils before you inhale again. This is called "following," because the mind follows the breath.

3. *Placing*. Breathe normally, but rather than concentrate on exhaling and inhaling, concentrate on the internal flow of the breath within the body. It is like a fine, still thread running from the tip of your nose to the soles of your feet. Examine the sensations the breath causes within the body along the points of this thread. Do you feel hot, cold, comfortable, uncomfortable, and so forth? Examine the pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral feelings that arise from the breath's movement in the body.

4. *Investigating.* Observe the breathing process. As you inhale and exhale, be aware that the breath isn't just wind; it's in the nature of all four elements — earth, water, fire, and wind — and the four element derivatives — visible form, odor, taste, and tangible objects. The breath is part of the body. Observe how the mind and mental factors depend on the breath, and how the mind and mental factors depend on the body and breath. The breath and the mind and mental factors are interrelated. Observe the way in which they mutually affect each other. When the relationship of mind and body is broken, the person dies.

5. *Changing.* Instead of focusing on the breath, use your mind, which has become serviceable and concentrated, to examine the four truths, which now become your object of meditation. As a result of this, the mind is able to proceed through the four stages of the path of preparation (heat, peak, fortitude, and supreme dharma).

6. *Purifying.* The mind goes on to cultivate the paths of seeing, meditation, and no-more-learning.

These six meditations are progressive and profound, the latter being harder than the preceding ones. When developing ability in them, start with the first and, when it is stable, proceed to the second, and so on. Alternatively, you can do several in one sitting, going all the way through the sequence of six.

The above three meditations on the foul aspects of the body, the skeleton, and the breath can be the observed objects for cultivating

serenity or they can be used to counteract the hindrances of attachment, restlessness, and discursive thought when they interrupt your meditation on another observed object. In the latter case, return to your original observed object after the affliction has subsided.

People tell me that when doing analytic meditation on lamrim or deity yoga practice, their minds are either distracted, wandering from this object to that, or they are drowsy. In this case, I recommend doing the meditations described above over a period of time. Witness for yourself the effect they have. The Buddha recommended these meditations because he knew they work!

REFLECTION

1. Do the three meditations described above by first making an outline of the meditation points: (1) meditating on the body to counteract desire, (2) meditating on a skeleton to counteract restlessness, and (3) meditating on the breath to counteract discursive thought (mental chatter).
2. Be aware of how each meditation affects your mind when you do it repeatedly.

Overcoming Hindrances

It is important not to become discouraged when the five hindrances arise in your meditation, but to make effort to eliminate them. This effort is different from pushing ourselves — it is steady and consistent; the mind is neither too tight nor too loose. As we familiarize ourselves with the antidotes over time, hindrances will gradually subside and the mind will become clearer. The concentrated mind of samādhi is blissful and focused. Free from the five hindrances, it can see the body, feelings, mind, and phenomena for what they are. With samādhi, we will come to know the power and potential of the mind, and will be able to integrate wisdom and compassion in our way of being. The Buddha gave several similes for the relief and freedom one feels when the five hindrances have subsided:

> Suppose a person is afflicted, suffering and gravely ill, and his food does not agree with him and his body has no strength, but later he recovers from the affliction and his food agrees with him and his body regains strength. Then on considering this, he will be glad and full of joy. Or

suppose a person is a slave, not autonomous but dependent on others, unable to go where he wants, but later he is released from slavery, independent of others, a free person able to go where he wants. On considering this, he is glad and full of joy. Or suppose a person with wealth and property enters a road across a desert, but later he crosses over the desert, safe and secure, with no loss of property. On considering this, he is glad and full of joy. So too, monastics, when these five hindrances are not abandoned in himself, a monastic sees them respectively as a disease, slavery, and a road across a desert. But when these five hindrances have been abandoned in himself, he sees that as good health, freedom from slavery, and a land of safety (MN 39.14).

The development of samādhi and serenity is a gradual process; it does not happen quickly or with little effort on our part — no matter how much we wish realizations could occur in that way! The Buddha used the simile of a goldsmith gradually purifying gold to illustrate this. He washes the gold well several times to separate the gold dust from earth, grit, sand, and dust. He then puts it into a melting pot and repeatedly melts it to remove all flaws. Only when the gold is pliant, workable, and bright can the goldsmith make what he wishes with it. The Buddha explains (AN 3.101):

> It is similar, monastics, with a monastic devoted to the higher mind: there are in him gross impurities, namely bad conduct of body, speech, and mind. Such conduct an earnest, capable monastic abandons, dispels, eliminates, and abolishes.
>
> When he has abandoned these, there are still impurities of a moderate degree that cling to him, namely sensual thoughts, thoughts of malice, and violent thoughts. Such thoughts an earnest, capable monastic abandons, dispels, eliminates, and abolishes.
>
> When he has abandoned these, there are still some subtle impurities that cling to him, namely thoughts about his relatives, his home country, and his reputation. Such thoughts an earnest, capable monastic abandons, dispels, eliminates, and abolishes.

> When he has abandoned these, there still remain thoughts about higher mental states experienced in meditation.[52] That concentration is not yet peaceful and sublime; it has not attained full serenity, nor has it achieved mental unification; it is maintained by strenuous suppression of the defilements.
>
> But there comes a time when his mind becomes inwardly steadied, composed, unified, and concentrated. That concentration is then calm and refined; it has attained to full serenity and achieved mental unification; it is not maintained by strenuous suppression of the defilements.
>
> Then to whatever mental state realizable by direct knowledge he directs his mind, he achieves the capacity of realizing that state by direct knowledge, whenever the necessary conditions occur.

Fortitude, continuous effort, and a relaxed mind free from unrealistic expectations are great aids to gain serenity and other realizations.

Some great Buddhist meditators dwell alone in the forest or mountains, not speaking to anyone and braving hardships. Hearing about them, some people have a romantic notion of living in solitude, withdrawn from the world. One day the Buddha heard about a bhikṣu who was dwelling alone and who encouraged others to do so. He entered a village on alms round alone, returned to his isolated place alone, sat alone, and did walking meditation alone. Calling this monk to him, the Buddha said that what he was doing was a way of dwelling alone, but fulfilling the real purpose of dwelling alone differed (SN 21:10):

> How is dwelling alone fulfilled in detail? Here, what lies in the past has been abandoned, what lies in the future has been relinquished, and attachment and sensual desire for present forms of individual existence have been thoroughly removed …
>
> The wise one, all-conqueror, all-knower,
>
> among all things unsullied, with all cast off,
>
> liberated in the destruction of craving:

I call that person "one who dwells alone."

Abandoning what lies in the past means releasing attachment and sensual desire for the aggregates of the past, which include the material possessions, reputation, praise, appreciation, and so forth we have received in the past. *Relinquishing what lies in the future* is to give up attachment to the aggregates of the future with all of its inner and outer trappings. *Removing attachment to present forms of existence* is to leave aside attachment to present sensual pleasures. In short, abandoning the view of a personal identity and craving for existence in the past, present, and future is the highest meaning of dwelling alone.

Keeping this in mind is important, lest conceit arise: I am a great meditator doing what others cannot do. I hope others speak well of me and bring me offerings because they respect my renunciation. Actually, such a person may have given up good food, but they are nourishing their conceit instead.

"All conqueror" is one who has overcome compulsive rebirth in saṃsāra. "Unsullied" is one who has given up craving and views, "all cast off" is freeing oneself from all defilements, and "liberated in the destruction of craving" is the attainment of arhatship. If we keep this in mind, we will train our mind to dwell alone in peace, separated from defilements.

REFLECTION

1. What does it mean to abandon what lies in the past, in the future, and in the present?
2. To function in society, we need to remember what we have learned in the past, to plan for the future, and to act in the present. Surely the Buddha is not instructing us to do nothing. How do we integrate his advice to abandon what lies in the past, present, and future with being an effective person, like he himself was?

The Five Faults and Eight Antidotes

The Sanskrit tradition as practiced in Tibet and China relies on the texts of Maitreya and Asaṅga for instructions on the method to cultivate serenity. In *Differentiation of the Middle and the Extremes* (*Madhyāntavibhāga*), Maitreya spoke of five faults that impede serenity and eight antidotes that eliminate them.

Five Faults and Their Antidotes

FAULT	ITS ANTIDOTES
laziness	confidence (faith) aspiration effort pliancy
forgetting the instruction (forgetting the object)	mindfulness
restlessness and laxity	introspective awareness
nonapplication of the antidote	application of antidotes
overapplication of the antidote	equanimity

1. *Laziness and Its Antidotes: Confidence, Aspiration, Effort, and Pliancy*

Laziness comes in three forms: (1) Sleeping a lot and laying around, doing nothing much at all, we procrastinate. (2) Keeping ourselves busy with worldly activities — work, socializing, shopping, looking at the latest happenings on our devices — we lack time to meditate. (3) Overwhelmed by discouragement, we feel inadequate and don't try to train our minds. It is easy to identify instances of all three types of laziness in our lives; overcoming them is more difficult. All three interfere with our ability to gain serenity. In the context of cultivating serenity, laziness refers to not wanting to do the practice to develop serenity.

The actual antidote to laziness in the context of cultivating serenity is mental pliancy. Since it takes a while to strengthen this mental factor, we begin by cultivating *confidence* (faith) in the benefits of serenity and concentration. These benefits include mental calm and peace, freedom from coarse destructive emotions, the ability to remain focused on a virtuous object without distraction, and a clear, powerful mind that facilitates the realization of emptiness.

Confidence is a joyous state of mind that gives rise to *aspiration*, which is interested in and aspires to cultivate serenity. This leads to *effort* that takes delight in concentration and is enthusiastic to attain it. This is like having confidence in the qualities of a product advertised on television. We aspire to buy it and happily make effort to do so.

On the path to attain serenity, we pass through the nine stages of sustained attention, during which we abandon the faults and hindrances to concentration — especially restlessness and laxity. *Pliancy*, the fourth antidote, actually accomplishes this. Pliancy is a mental factor that is free from all mental and physical unserviceability — factors that impede the body and mind from cultivating virtue whenever we like. With physical and mental pliancy, our body feels light and flexible, and our mind easily remains focused on whatever virtuous object we choose.

2. *Forgetting the Instruction and Its Antidote, Mindfulness*

Forgetting the instruction means forgetting the meditation object. Having overcome coarse laziness, we sit on the meditation cushion and try to concentrate, but our untrained mind quickly strays from the observed object to objects of attachment, anger, jealousy, and worry. Instead of focusing on the meditation object, we think about future vacation sites or the argument we had with a colleague. The antidote is mindfulness, a mental factor that is familiar with the meditation object and holds the mind on it in such a way that distraction and forgetfulness cannot arise. Mindfulness is closely related to memory and applies only to an object with which we are well acquainted.

Losing the meditation object mainly occurs on the first four stages of sustained attention. Losing the object is like a child running out of the room; mindfulness is analogous to bringing him back inside. By continually bringing our mind back to the observed object whenever it strays, mindfulness makes the distracting thoughts gradually subside. Bhāvaviveka said:[53]

> The elephant of the mind wandering wildly
>
> is to be securely bound with the rope of mindfulness
>
> to the pillar of a meditation object,
>
> and is gradually tamed with the hook of wisdom.

Ethical conduct is a precursor to serenity, because it develops mindfulness in daily life activities. Whether we are walking, standing, sitting, or lying, we must maintain mindfulness of our precepts and of suitable behavior for that situation. Doing this facilitates mindfulness of our meditation object because physical and verbal actions are easier

to control than mental activity. Conscientiousness — a mental factor that values thinking, speaking, and acting constructively — is a key element.

Talking and having a busy social life cause many thought preconceptions to flood our minds. By speaking and socializing less, unrealistic and unbeneficial conceptualizations gradually decrease. One meditator I know in Dharamsala spends six days of the week in total silence but talks a little on the day his attendant brings his weekly supplies. Sometimes, even for several months, he will not talk at all. While this is not practical for most of us, we should try to speak only what is necessary, wise, kind, and appropriate to the circumstances. Chatting here and there with this person and that disturbs our meditation, as well as the people around us!

3. *Restlessness and Laxity and Their Antidote, Introspective Awareness*

Single-pointedness of mind has two characteristics: (1) *Stability* is the ability to stay on the meditation object without wandering to another object. The chief obstacle to stability is restlessness, which scatters the mind toward other objects. (2) *Clarity* is vibrancy of the subject, the meditating mind apprehending the object. Its chief obstacle is *laxity*, which decreases the intensity of the clarity, so that the mind's way of apprehending the object becomes loose. Because restlessness[54] and laxity have the same antidote, introspective awareness, they are grouped together as the third fault.

Restlessness

Scattering (T. *'phro wa*) occurs when the mind moves to another object. It may be virtuous — for example, straying from the meditation object of the image of the Buddha to think about precious human life instead. It may be nonvirtuous, such as plotting our revenge for a harm inflicted on us. It may be neutral — for example, thinking about doing the laundry after the meditation session. Distraction (mental wandering, T. *rnam gyeng*) is the same as scattering. Discursiveness or conceptualization (*vikalpa*, *vikappa*, T. *rnam rtog*) is similar to scattering and distraction and implies that the mind is filled with mental chatter, useless thoughts, and worries.

Restlessness is a type of scattering and distraction; it is associated with attachment because the mind goes to objects of attachment. Restlessness, not scattering, is considered one of the five faults because when we try to cultivate concentration, our attention tends to stray toward objects of attachment more than toward other objects. *Coarse restlessness* causes us to lose the meditation object completely and shifts our attention to a desirable object — food, an attractive person, a car, or a promotion.

With *subtle restlessness*, the meditation object is not entirely lost, but one part of the mind comes under the influence of discursive thought and a pleasing object of desire is about to appear in our mind. This is compared to water under ice; the ice (our concentration) looks firm, but something else (subtle restlessness) is going on under the surface and the ice risks cracking. Subtle restlessness is like a bird with a chained foot: the mind hasn't forgotten the meditation object but is unable to fully engage in it. It is more difficult to recognize than coarse restlessness because there is still stability and clarity, but the undercurrent of mind is moving toward another object due to attachment. This often arises when our focus on the meditation object is too tight. If subtle restlessness increases and we lose the meditation object completely, coarse restlessness has arisen.

The antidote to restlessness is introspective awareness, a mental factor that monitors the mind and is a form of intelligence. When mindfulness is powerful, introspective awareness comes naturally, and when introspective awareness is strong, mindfulness can easily be maintained. Mindfulness holds the object of meditation, and introspective awareness assesses whether restlessness or laxity have arisen and are interrupting concentration. While our main focus remains on the meditation object, introspective awareness, like a spy, discreetly surveys the situation from time to time to see if any faults to concentration are present. If so, we must apply the specific antidote to that fault.

Introspective awareness is especially important during the early stages of developing concentration. When concentration is more stable and faults are less likely to arise, introspective awareness does not need to monitor the mind as much. Employing introspective awareness too often may provoke restlessness, so skill is needed in using it.

Although introspective awareness is posited as the antidote to both restlessness and laxity, it is not the actual antidote. By observing the mind, it identifies the presence of restlessness or laxity and sets in motion the process to remedy it. Lacking introspective awareness is analogous to a burglar entering our house and our having no awareness of theft occurring right under our nose.

The remedy to coarse restlessness is to bring attention back to the meditation object and renew mindfulness on it. If this does not work, temporarily leave the meditation object and reflect on a topic that makes the mind sober, such as impermanence and death or the duḥkha of cyclic existence. When the mind's energy is lower, return to your original meditation object. Focusing on the breath may also calm restlessness.

If these methods do not work and restlessness continues, visualize your spiritual mentor in the form of the Buddha above your head. Imagine white light and nectar flowing from his heart, flowing down into your body, purifying all negativities and eliminating all hindrances to serenity, especially restlessness. Request inspiration from the Buddha to gain serenity for the benefit of all sentient beings.

If your mind is still very agitated, pause the meditation session and resume it at another time.

The remedy for subtle restlessness is to relax the intensity of concentration slightly, but not so much that we lose the object.

Although restlessness is the chief form of scattering to look out for, whenever your attention wanders to another meditation object, even a virtuous one, bring it back. If you are visualizing the Buddha and your attention scatters to Tārā, bring the mind back to the Buddha. When contemplating impermanence, if you switch to meditating on the disadvantages of saṃsāra, immediately return to your original object. If a camper wants to start a campfire but becomes distracted by the beautiful scenery and lets the fire diminish, she must begin all over again. So, too, if we want to cultivate concentration but let our attention wander, we will have to start anew.

While knowing the definitions and functions of the mental factors that interrupt concentration and those that support it is necessary, identifying these in our own experience is essential. It takes time and effort to observe how our mind operates, but doing this is the key to making the Dharma come alive for us. Otherwise there is danger that

our intellectual knowledge of the teachings will simply increase our arrogance rather than decrease our afflictions.

Laxity

Laxity differs from lethargy, which is a heaviness of body and mind that is close to sleep. Lethargy causes the decline of both stability and clarity. The mind is dull and passive; it may even begin to dream. Lethargy isn't mentioned as one of the five faults because on higher levels of concentration it is less frequent than laxity, but when laxity is mentioned, lethargy is implied. At initial levels of practice, lethargy is a noticeable obstacle for many people.

When *coarse laxity* is present, there is some stability on the object, but the clarity has decreased. The object doesn't appear so clearly, and we may start to lose it. Although the mind isn't distracted to another object and isn't drowsy, it lacks force. It remains in a vague state with an agreeable sensation. Perhaps it resembles what my Western friends call "spaced out."

Because the mind has become too withdrawn inside, the antidote to coarse laxity is to enlarge the scope of the meditation object. Make it brighter, elaborate on the details. If the meditation object is the image of the Buddha, employ analysis to review the details of the Buddha's form. Visualizing bright light filling the room or looking at a light also helps. If coarse laxity persists, temporarily leave the meditation object and contemplate a topic that will elevate your spirits and invigorate the mind — for example, precious human life, the benefits of concentration, the benefits of bodhicitta, or the excellent qualities of the Three Jewels. Such reflection energizes the mind and makes it joyful. If coarse laxity continues, visualize your spiritual mentor and make a request as described above, and then return to your meditation object. Otherwise stop the session, splash water on your face, take a walk outdoors, and look out at a vista.

Subtle laxity is the worst fault when trying to generate serenity. With it, the mind has become too relaxed. Although clarity remains and the mind may abide single-pointedly on the object, the freshness or vigor of the clarity has declined because the mind's grip on the object has become too loose; a subtle sluggishness, weakness, and lack of comprehension are present.

Subtle laxity is difficult to recognize because it's similar to samādhi in that both have stability and clarity and both are characterized by the

mind being peaceful and experiencing a pleasurable sensation. Because of these similarities, subtle laxity is especially dangerous. A meditator's breath may stop, and she may sit in meditation for days. Afterward, she may think she has attained serenity and makes no effort to improve her meditation, when in fact subtle laxity was present.

Subtle laxity has many disadvantages. Our meditation doesn't become a cause to attain serenity and we may become forgetful in this life and be born as an animal in the next. Mindfulness becomes weak and wisdom decreases. Eventually coarse laxity returns and we may lose clarity completely.

Someone once said to me, "I have good concentration on the object, but I lack energy for the welfare of other beings." I believe this was because the person's meditation suffered from subtle laxity. Subtle laxity is like a tied donkey; it looks calm but is ignorant. Correct concentration, on the other hand, should make the mind alert and vibrant.

Another person mentioned to me that while he was meditating to gain serenity, his mind became duller and he couldn't think as clearly. I responded that this indicated that something was amiss in his meditation — he had not detected the presence of subtle laxity.

The remedy for subtle laxity is to hold the meditation object more firmly and tighten the mode of apprehension of the object. But if we hold the object too tightly, restlessness may arise. Finding the right balance is like holding a tiny bird: our grip must be neither too tight nor too loose. The proper balance is developed only through experience. If we err, it's better to be on side of tightness because restlessness is easier to recognize and overcome than laxity.

Skill is required to use introspective awareness properly to identify lethargy, laxity, distraction, and restlessness. If our introspective awareness is weak, we won't recognize interruptions to concentration. If it is overactive, it interrupts the flow of concentration and prevents the mind from becoming stable. Mindfulness and introspective awareness go hand in hand. Mindfulness is like holding a full cup of water; introspective awareness is like an occasional glance to see if the water is spilling. Initially we aim for stability on the object through mindfulness. Later, when we are more familiar with the object and our attention span is longer, introspective awareness is needed to check for

faults such as restlessness and laxity. Until introspective awareness is strong, our meditation remains prey to these two faults.

Initially periods of laxity and restlessness are strong and frequent. Through practice they become weaker and periods of concentration on the object become longer. In time, subtle laxity and restlessness lose their force and disappear.

Nonapplication and Its Antidote, Application of the Antidotes

Nonapplication is not applying the antidote even when we know restlessness or laxity is present. It is similar to a general not sending out troops once a spy has discovered the enemy lurking about. Nonapplication occurs principally in the seventh stage of sustained attention, but something similar to it may occur earlier. The antidote is to *apply the appropriate antidote* to whichever fault has arisen and exert effort to eliminate it: holding the object and paying closer attention to it when laxity arises, relaxing our mental grip on the object when restlessness is present.

Overapplication and Its Antidote, Equanimity

Overapplication is excessive exertion; it occurs when we apply antidotes to restlessness and laxity although they haven't occurred or have already been eliminated. It resembles a parent correcting a child when the child is behaving well — it simply disturbs the child. This fault occurs mainly in the eighth stage of sustained attention, although a similitude may occur earlier. The antidote to overapplication is *equanimity*, in which we relax our effort a little, but not too much.

In short, the Indian sage Atiśa advises us:

> Avoid all factors that hinder samādhi,
>
> and cultivate conducive factors
>
> [by] applying the eight antidotes for eliminating negativities.
>
> This is the rubbing stick
>
> free from the moisture of attachment
>
> for igniting the fire of the spiritual path.
>
> Meditate in this way with intensity.

REFLECTION

1. Identify each of the five faults in your own meditation. Which one is the most troublesome for your present level of development?
2. Practice noticing each fault when it arises and applying its antidote. Do this over a period of time.
3. What change do you see in your meditation?

The Nine Stages of Sustained Attention

The nine stages of sustained attention and six powers are explained in Asaṅga's *Śrāvaka Grounds* and *Compendium of Knowledge* (*Abhidharmasamuccaya*).

The nine stages of sustained attention (*navākārā cittasthiti*) are stages of concentration on the way to serenity. The six powers and four types of attention (mental engagement) help to overcome faults, stabilize the mind on the object, and increase clarity. In doing so, they enable meditators to progress sequentially through the nine stages. The six powers (*bala*) are:

1. Through *hearing* (*śruta*), we learn the teachings on the method to cultivate serenity and place our mind on the observed object as instructed by our teacher. The first stage of sustained attention is accomplished by hearing.
2. Through repeated *reflection* (*cintā*) on the meditation object, we become able to stabilize the mind on it for a short while. Reflection accomplishes the second stage of sustained attention.
3. *Mindfulness* (*smṛti*) repeatedly brings the mind back to the object and accomplishes the third stage. Generated at the beginning of the session, mindfulness stabilizes the mind on the object and prevents distraction so the fourth stage is attained.
4. *Introspective awareness* (*saṃprajanya*) sees the faults of discursive thoughts, auxiliary afflictions, and distraction to sense objects, and does not allow the mind to go toward other objects, thoughts, or emotions. It helps to tame and calm the

mind and becomes prominent during the fifth and sixth stages.

5. *Effort* (*vīrya*) exerts energy to eliminate even subtle discursive thoughts and auxiliary afflictions and prevents the mind from getting involved with them. Preventing restlessness, laxity, and so forth from interfering with the flow of concentration, effort enables the meditator to focus the mind by releasing distractions. It is prominent on the seventh and eighth stages.

6. Through *complete familiarity* (*paricaya*) with the above powers, the mind spontaneously remains in samādhi. This power is found on the ninth stage.

The four types of attention determine how the mind engages with the meditation object.

1. *Tight focus* (*balavāhana*) is used on the first and second stages of sustained attention to reinforce mindfulness.

2. When there is more stability, *interrupted focus* (*sacchidravāhana*) is used to attain the third through seventh stages.

3. *Uninterrupted focus* (*niśchidravāhana*) corresponds with the eighth stage.

4. *Spontaneous focus* (*anābhogavāhana*) is present with the ninth stage.

Maitreya outlined the nine stages of sustained attention in his *Ornament of Mahāyāna Sūtras*. Each line describes the activity of one stage.

1. Having directed the mind to the object of observation,

2. do not allow its continuum to be distracted.

3. Having noticed distraction, quickly return [the mind] to that [object].

4. The aware also withdraw the mind inwardly more and more.

5. Then, seeing the good benefits of concentration, tame the mind in concentration.

6. By seeing the faults of distraction, pacify dislike for [concentration].

7. Desire and so forth as well as discomfort and so forth likewise should be pacified [immediately] upon arising.
8. Then, those who make effort at restraint [of faults need only] make [a little] effort to [concentrate] the mind.
9. Natural arising is attained. Aside from familiarizing with that, one desists from activity.

Let's look at the nine stages of sustained attention and the role the six powers and four types of attention play in them.

1. *Placing the Mind* (*Cittasthāpana*)

To begin, we must identify the observed object and place the mind on it, even though our attention may not remain on it for long. To do this, withdraw your attention from external objects and with mindfulness place it on the meditation object. Do not follow distracting thoughts, sounds, and so forth.

The appearance of the object isn't clear, and the mind is filled with discursive thoughts, one coming after the other. Our mind may seem noisier than usual, although in actuality it isn't. It's simply that for the first time we are aware of how busy the mind is. For example, someone living near a highway is so familiar with the sound of traffic that he does not usually notice it. Only when he goes to a quiet place does the noise he is accustomed to become apparent. Discursive thoughts are automatically pacified in the process of progressing through the nine stages, so do not be discouraged. As your mindfulness strengthens, the flood of thoughts will gradually subside.

The first stage of sustained attention is accomplished by the power of hearing, for we apply the mind to the instructions we have previously heard from a teacher and set our mind on the object. Tight focus helps us to gain a strong hold on the object.

2. *Continual Placement* (*Saṃsthāpana*)

Initially our goal is to keep our attention on the object and not let it stray. Through practice and employing the power of reflection, the mind is able to continually stay on the object for a short while. This marks the second stage of sustained attention. Tight focus is still necessary to keep the mind on the meditation object, but now the

mind can remain on the object a little longer. Still, the time spent in distraction exceeds the time the mind abides on the object, and our concentration is constantly interrupted by scattering to other objects. However, distractions and discursive thoughts begin to take a rest and their force weakens. We begin to experience a little peace of mind.

3. *Repeated Placement* (*Avasthāpana*)

Now our aim is to recognize when the object is lost due to distraction and reset it on the object more quickly. Gradually, distractions decrease, and when they do arise, we are able to recognize them. Previously we couldn't immediately regain concentration on the object once it was lost, but now, due to developing mindfulness on the previous two stages, mindfulness easily returns to the meditation object and attention returns inward. Our focus is interrupted because concentration is not continuous. Still, scattering is recognized at once, so its duration is shorter and our ability to remain on the object increases. At this time, the third stage of sustained attention arises.

4. *Close Placement* (*Upasthāpana*)

As we develop more familiarity with the object, forgetting the object greatly decreases. Mindfulness is generated at the beginning of a session and attention remains on the object with fewer distractions. The mind becomes subtler and is more easily drawn inward, away from the expansive diversity of thoughts and objects. Coarse restlessness and laxity are present, so our focus on the object is still interrupted.[55] Nevertheless, the power of mindfulness is strong. Now the fourth stage of sustained attention arises.

5. *Taming* (*Damana*)

The mind is disciplined and tamed so that it can stay on the object almost continuously. The power of introspective awareness stops the mind from wandering to destructive emotions and discursive thoughts about sense objects. Coarse laxity and coarse restlessness are no longer problems. Previously subtle laxity wasn't a problem because single-pointedness was difficult to attain. However, now the mind may become too absorbed in the object so that subtle laxity occurs. Subtle

laxity and subtle restlessness interrupt the focus, but concentration is easily restored by the power of introspective awareness. Being aware of the benefits of concentration, we take delight in it and attain the fifth stage of sustained attention.

6. *Pacifying* (*Śamana*)

Through the power of introspective awareness, conviction that distraction is to be abandoned becomes firm, and all resistance to or dislike for single-pointed meditation is gone. During the previous stage, concentration was tightened in order to eliminate laxity. Now it may be too tight, making the mind restless and causing subtle restlessness. Subtle laxity may still arise occasionally, so both subtle laxity and subtle restlessness cause interrupted focus on the object. Having matured through practice, the power of introspective awareness can sometimes identify and deal with restlessness and laxity before they arise. The sixth stage of sustained attention, pacifying, now arises.

7. *Thoroughly Pacifying* (*Vyupaśamana*)

Even if subtle thoughts or subtle destructive emotions such as attachment, resentment, lethargy, and so on manifest, they are easily pacified. Subtle laxity and subtle restlessness arise occasionally, so focus is still interrupted, but the power of effort easily and quickly stops them. Mindfulness, introspective awareness, and effort are well developed, but nonapplication of the antidotes may still occur. At this point the seventh stage of sustained attention arises.

8. *Making Single-Pointed* (*Ekotīkaraṇa*)

As a result of mindfulness and effort, laxity and restlessness are not able to interrupt concentration, so focus is uninterrupted. After sitting down to meditate, we can immediately apprehend the meditation object and concentration remains on it continuously. Only a little effort is needed at the beginning of a session to discern the details of the object and to guard against laxity and restlessness. After that, the mind stays on the object without faltering through the power of effort. The eighth stage of sustained attention now arises and single-pointed concentration can remain for a long time.

9. *Placement in Equipoise* (*Samādhāna*)

Gradually the power of complete familiarity becomes stronger and effort to maintain mindfulness and introspective awareness is no longer required. The mind engages with the object willingly and the ninth stage is attained. Just the wish to meditate is required at the beginning of the session. Once mindfulness is placed on the object and the mind enters meditative equipoise, it effortlessly and naturally remains in single-pointed concentration without having to evoke mindfulness. The focus on the object of meditation is spontaneous and single-pointed meditation automatically continues for a long time. The sense consciousnesses are totally absorbed and no longer respond to external stimuli during meditation. This is the highest concentration attainment with a desire-realm mind. It is a similitude of serenity; fully qualified serenity has not yet been attained.

According to the Tibetan scholar Chim Jampelyang, the first three stages are means to enable the mind, which is generally fluctuating and moving from object to object, to abide on its meditation object. The second three stages are the means to stabilize the mind that is already abiding on its object, although stability can still be disturbed by coarse restlessness and laxity. The last three stages are means to gain full control of the mind that has achieved stability.

As we progress through these stages of sustained attention, the strength of our mind and the power of our meditation increase in dependence on each other. Clarity and stability correspondingly increase, resulting in mental and physical peace and happiness. Our complexion becomes youthful and radiant, we feel light and vigorous, and dependence on coarse food decreases.

Mental and Physical Pliancy and the Bliss of Physical and Mental Pliancy

After the ninth stage, mental pliancy, physical pliancy, the bliss of physical pliancy, and the bliss of mental pliancy need to be cultivated in that sequence to attain serenity. Some people are able to do this quickly; others must meditate for weeks before attaining serenity. Asaṅga says in *Compendium of Knowledge* (LC 3:82):

> What is pliancy? It is a serviceability of the body and mind due to the cessation of the continuum of physical and mental dysfunctions. It functions to dispel all obstructions.

Physical dysfunctions are factors related to winds (*prāṇa*) in the body that make the body heavy and uncomfortable when we try to engage in virtue. Mental dysfunctions prevent taking delight in eradicating afflictions. Through increased familiarity with concentration, physical dysfunctions are overcome. At this time, the brain feels heavy — though not in an uncomfortable way — and there is a pleasant tingling sensation at the top the head, as if a warm hand were placed on the crown after our head was freshly shaved. This sensation occurs as dysfunctional winds leave from the crown. Immediately afterward, dysfunctional mental states are overcome and *mental pliancy* is attained. In general, mental pliancy is a mental factor that accompanies all virtuous minds and enables the mind to be directed toward a virtuous object. However, this is a special mental pliancy that is a serviceability of mind — a lightness and clarity of mind coupled with the ability to set the mind on whatever virtuous object we wish. The mind no longer resists being directed toward virtuous objects and is happy to meditate and stay on the meditation object.

The Nine Stages of Sustained Attention

STAGE	POWER	ATTENTION	MAIN FAULT	MAIN ANTIDOTE	WHAT TO ACCOMPLISH ON THIS STAGE
1. placing the mind	hearing	tight focus	laziness, forgetting the object, distraction, scattering	conviction, aspiration, effort	identify meditation object and place the mind on it
2. continued placement	reflection		forgetting the object, distraction, scattering	mindfulness	remain on the object a little longer
3. repeated placement	mindfulness	interrupted focus	forgetting the object, distrac-tion, scattering	mindfulness	recognize when object has been lost and reset attention on it
4. close placement			coarse restlessness and coarse laxity	introspective awareness	strengthen mindfulness so can remain on object longer without distraction
5. taming	introspective awareness		subtle laxity	introspective awareness	stop wandering so can remain on object almost continuously
6. pacifying			subtle laxity and subtle restlessness		abandon all resistance to con-centration, identify laxity and restlessness before they arise
7. thoroughly pacifying	effort		nonapplication of the antidote/ restlessness and laxity may arise, but are quickly stopped	application of the antidote	easily pacify subtle afflictions
8. making single-pointed		uninterrupted focus	overapplication of the antidote	equanimity	only a little effort is needed at beginning of session, guard against restlessness and laxity
9. placement in equipoise	complete familiarity	spontaneous focus		pliancy	no effort needed to maintain mindfulness and introspective awareness, mind habitually remains single-pointed

Mental pliancy in turn induces serviceability of the winds flowing through the body because the winds that power afflictions have subsided. A wind of physical pliancy pervades the entire body and the body's lack of serviceability for meditation is overcome. This is *physical pliancy* — a lightness, buoyancy, and serviceability of body that enables the body to be used for whatever virtuous purpose we wish without pain, fatigue, or hardship. The body feels as light as a cotton ball, almost as if we could ride on our own shoulders. Physical pliancy immediately leads to experiencing the *bliss of physical pliancy*, which is a very blissful tactile sensation. The body feels incredibly comfortable and fresh, and we can use it in virtuous activities as we wish.

As concentration continues, there is the sense that the body has melted into the meditation object. At this point, the *bliss of mental pliancy* is experienced. The mind is very joyous — almost too buoyant — and we feel as if we could focus on each atom of a wall. Following this, there is a sensation on the top of the head — similar to placing a cool hand on top of a freshly shaven head — and the mental bliss decreases a little. When it becomes stable, *unfluctuating bliss of concentration* and *unfluctuating mental pliancy* arise. At this point serenity is attained. I know a monk who studied well and later meditated to develop serenity. He described to me the bliss arising from physical and mental pliancy.

Serenity is concentration arisen from meditation that is accompanied by the bliss of mental and physical pliancy in which the mind abides effortlessly without fluctuation for as long as we wish on whatever object it has been placed. Stabilizing meditation has been brought to fulfillment. Kamalaśīla's second *Stages of Meditation* says (LR 3:80):

> For you who have cultivated serenity in this way, when your body and mind become pliant and you have mastery over your mind in directing it as you wish, at that time know that you have accomplished serenity.

Many signs occur with the attainment of serenity: The body and the mind are flexible and serviceable; physical and mental pliancy arise quickly when we meditate. The mind is very spacious and can abide firmly and steadily on its meditation object; even a loud sound will not interfere with concentration. There is a sense of great clarity, as if we could count atoms. In postmeditation time, afflictions don't arise as often or as strongly, and craving for sense pleasures has decreased. We can meditate as long as we wish without any discomfort; the body feels light and at ease and the mind is free from the five hindrances. Sleep can easily be transformed into meditation and wonderful experiences may occur during sleep. Even after arising from meditation, some degree of physical and mental pliancy remain. Afflictions may arise in break times, but in general they are weaker and can be easily subdued.

Serenity has three qualities:

1. *Nonconceptuality* is nondiscursive stability, the stability that comes with the absence of distracting thoughts. In this context "nonconceptuality" does not mean that the mind perceives its object directly without the medium of a conceptual appearance. Rather, it indicates the mind can stay on the observed object of meditation for as long as we wish because it is free from restlessness and does not conceptualize any other object.

2. *Clarity* in this context means that the mind is free from laxity and the object clearly appears.

3. *Benefit* in this context means that the bliss of mental and physical pliancy has been attained.

Once serenity has been attained, four afflictions can interfere with maintaining and improving the quality of concentration. It is important to monitor the mind diligently and avoid falling prey to them.

1. *Attachment* to the pleasure of serenity or whatever level of absorption we have attained prevents us from cultivating wisdom. Content to remain in blissful concentration, we relinquish the opportunity to realize emptiness.
2. *Arrogance* thinking that we are superior to others because we have attained meditative absorption distracts us from deepening our concentration and wisdom.
3. *Ignorance* mistaking deep states of absorption for liberation keeps us bound in saṃsāra. The result of this is especially painful at the time of death, when a meditator expects to attain nirvāṇa without remainder but instead realizes he will be reborn in saṃsāra.
4. *Wrong views* obstruct gaining the correct, liberating view of emptiness.

In *Śrāvaka Grounds*, Asaṅga recommends (LC 3:89):

> When you attain the mind of serenity, in this way, signs, thoughts, or auxiliary afflictions may appear, manifest, or become the object, because of forgetfulness or the fault of lack of habituation. Do not fall immediately under the influence of the faults that you have previously observed. Neither recall them nor pay attention to them. In this way, because you are neither being mindful of this object nor attending to it, it dissolves; and when it is dispelled, you will settle in the absence of the appearance of these obstructions.

While cultivating the nine stages of sustained attention and during the first period of time after attaining serenity, the meditation object is a conceptual appearance perceived by a conceptual mental consciousness. As meditation continues and serenity becomes more refined, a point is reached where the object is so vivid that it is known nonconceptually. At this point, the object is no longer a conceptual appearance of, for example, the Buddha, but a form that is a

phenomena source (*dharmāyatana rūpa*) — a form appearing only to mental consciousness.

Human beings who have attained serenity or higher absorptions do not lose their single-pointed concentration during the break times between meditation sessions. However, it is not manifest, and their five senses function when they go about their daily activities. Although their afflictions are weaker due to the power of samādhi, they may still manifest, so practitioners must maintain mindfulness and introspective awareness in all activities.

During such a retreat to generate serenity, do mainly stabilizing meditation with little analytical meditation. Asaṅga instructs (LC 3:89):

> At that time [of cultivating serenity], this [concentration] attends to an image without discursive thought, and it exclusively focuses mindfulness one-pointedly on the object. It does not examine it, classify it, investigate it, ponder it, or analyze it.

Asaṅga indicates that the practice of serenity does not involve analytical activity. Kamalaśīla agrees and says in *Stages of Meditation* (LC 3:89):

> The nature of serenity is nothing more than a one-pointed mind. This is the general characteristic of all meditative serenity.

Serenity is not a stage of concentration. It is a quality that pervades all meditative absorptions.

Some people erroneously believe that any meditation that lacks analysis and discursive thought must be meditation on emptiness, but this is not the case.

When, after attaining serenity, concentration is conjoined with the aspiration for liberation, it becomes a path to liberation. When it is conjoined with bodhicitta, it becomes a Mahāyāna path leading to awakening.

A Diagram Illustrating the Process of Attaining Serenity

The diagram on page 166 illustrates the process of cultivating serenity. It depicts a monk (the meditator) chasing after and finally subduing an elephant (his mind). The numbers on the diagram correspond to the following explanations.

1. The six bends in the road represent the six powers. The first bend signifies the power of hearing our spiritual mentors' instructions on how to cultivate serenity.
2. The first stage, placing the mind, is attained by the power of hearing instructions.
3. The rope represents the power of mindfulness.
4. The taming hook represents the power of introspective awareness.
5. The flame is found from this point until the seventh stage, after which it is no longer present. It decreases in size, indicating the decreasing amount of effort needed to apply mindfulness and introspective awareness.
6. The elephant represents the mind; its black color indicates laxity.
7. The monkey symbolizes distraction in general; its black color indicates restlessness in particular. The monk is chasing the elephant and monkey, indicating that he has little control over the laxity and distraction that plague his mind.
8. This bend represents the power of reflection on the meditation object, which will lead to the second stage.
9. The second stage, continual placement is attained when the length of focus on the meditation object has increased.
10. Exposure to the five sense objects incites restlessness and hinders concentration.
11. The elephant now walks instead of runs — the mind is beginning to calm down. The elephant gradually turns white, representing increased clarity on the object and increased focus on it.
12. This bend represents the power of mindfulness, which leads to attaining both the third and fourth stages.

13. The third stage, repeated placement, is attained. The meditator has lassoed the elephant and can bring his attention back to the meditation object when it has been interrupted by coarse laxity or restlessness.

14. The hare represents subtle laxity. Now the meditator can distinguish between gross and subtle laxity.

15. The animals looking backward indicates that the mind is gaining strength over the faults and represents the mind's ability to return to the meditation object after recognizing mental wandering.

16. The fourth stage, close placement, is attained. The meditator is able to bring his attention back to the meditation object more quickly.

17. This bend represents the power of introspective awareness, which leads to the attainment of the fifth and sixth stages.

18. Restlessness's ability to affect the mind is curbed.

19. The monkey gathering fruit from the tree to the side of the meditation path represents the distinction between virtuous thoughts that arise when doing stabilizing meditation and at other times. The ones that arise during stabilizing meditation must be suppressed because they distract the meditator from the meditation object, whereas virtuous thoughts that arise at other times are to be encouraged.

20. The meditator is no longer chasing the wild elephant of the mind but is now leading it. Laxity and restlessness have decreased.

21. The fifth stage, taming, is attained and coarse laxity and coarse restlessness are no longer problems. The meditator begins to lead the elephant and the monkey follows. The mind is more controlled, although the meditator must goad the elephant.

22. The sixth stage, pacifying, is attained, and all resistance to or dislike for single-pointed meditation is gone. The hare (subtle laxity) is gone.

23. This bend represents the power of effort, which leads to attaining the seventh and eighth stages.

24. The seventh stage, thoroughly pacifying, is attained. It is now difficult for subtle laxity and subtle restlessness to arise, and if they do, they can be easily eliminated with a small amount of effort. The monkey stands behind the meditator and pays homage to him.
25. The elephant is completely white and the monkey is no longer present, symbolizing that by applying a little mindfulness and introspective awareness at the beginning of the meditation session, the meditator can enter an interrupted state of single-pointed concentration in which laxity, restlessness, and distractions do not have the power to interrupt concentration. The eighth stage is near.
26. The eighth stage, making single-pointed, is attained. Laxity and restlessness are not able to interrupt concentration, so the focus is uninterrupted. At the beginning of the session, the meditator can immediately apprehend the meditation object and can continuously maintain concentration on it.
27. This bend represents the power of complete familiarity, through which the ninth stage is attained.
28. The ninth stage, placing in equipoise, is attained. The elephant rests besides the meditator, who sits at ease. The mind effortlessly stays on the meditation object without any interruption during the entire session. A rainbow streams from the meditator's heart.
29. The meditator rides the elephant along the rainbow path en route to serenity. The meditator experiences the bliss of physical and mental pliancy.
30. Serenity is attained.
31. Mental joy is present.
32. The monk rides the completely pacified elephant. By attaining the union of serenity and insight with emptiness as the object, the monk holds the sword of wisdom. Ignorance, the root of saṃsāra, is now in the process of being cut.
33. With extremely powerful mindfulness and wisdom, represented by the flames, the meditator continues to meditate

on emptiness. With his meditation informed by bodhicitta, he eradicates all defilements from the mind.

8 | The Meditative Absorptions

SERENITY IS A TOOL to aid our practice; it is not an end in itself. The purpose of gaining serenity is to be able to cultivate insight and then to unite serenity and insight, which empowers the mind to be able to either temporarily suppress or completely eliminate afflictions. Having attained serenity, a practitioner may follow one of two paths. One is a *mundane path*, leading to the attainment of higher meditative absorptions in this life, birth in the form or formless realm in the next life, and perhaps the first five superknowledges. The mundane path involves mundane insight, which contemplates the drawbacks (grossness) of the lower states of meditative absorption and the benefits (peacefulness) of the higher states within cyclic existence and results in temporarily suppressing afflictions.[56] This path is common to both Buddhists and non-Buddhists.

The other is a *supramundane path*, in which serenity is used as the basis for the cultivation of insight into the sixteen attributes of the four truths, especially selflessness and emptiness. This is unique to Buddhist practitioners and leads to nirvāṇa and full awakening. Serenity is required to proceed on either of these two paths.

Understanding the meditative absorptions will benefit your practice. You will know that the practice of cultivating serenity and higher meditative states requires patience, fortitude, and effort, and that it's best to approach this without expectation of quick results gained with little effort. These teachings provide a road map to follow that enables us to practice in a steady, sequential manner and to more accurately evaluate our practice and experiences in meditation. This prevents us from becoming arrogant or giddy with excitement after having an especially "good" session or an unusual experience. In this way, we will continue to practice with a balanced mind and a good motivation.

The teachings in this chapter and the next are complex and require study on our part to learn. There are several new terms, which, with study, you will become familiar with. You may find it helpful to make an outline of the topics.

Cultivating Mundane Insight

Saṃsāra consists of three realms — the desire, form, and formless realms.[57] The desire realm is so called because the beings in it are distracted to external objects of desire. The form realm, where beings have a subtler body than ours, consists of four levels of dhyāna (meditative stabilizations), while the formless realm, where beings do not have a coarse body, has four levels of meditative absorption.

We live in the desire realm and know it exists. How can we establish the existence of the form and formless realms? One way is to examine our states of mind. Our mental state in the desire realm is much grosser due to our distraction and obsession with external objects and their perception by the five sense faculties — eye, ear, nose, tongue, and touch. When we develop even a little concentration, our mind becomes more peaceful and stable. When this is enhanced, serenity is attained and the mind becomes even calmer and subtler. From this we can intuit that there are progressively deeper states of meditative absorption that are even more peaceful and subtle, and we can infer that there are sentient beings who take birth in these deep meditative absorptions and dwell in them for a long time.

Corresponding to the three realms (*dhātu* or *laukya*, *loka*) are the three spheres (*avacara*) of consciousness: (1) the desire sphere of consciousness (P. *kāmāvacaracitta*), (2) the form sphere of consciousness (P. *rūpāvacaracitta*), and (3) the formless sphere of consciousness (P. *arūpāvacaracitta*). These spheres of consciousness are a classification of mental states while the realms are planes of existence or worlds into which sentient beings are born. Usually beings in a particular realm have the sphere of consciousness corresponding to that realm. However, a being of another realm may have that sphere of consciousness on occasion. For example, human beings are born in the desire realm and have a desire-sphere consciousness. Upon attaining serenity, a human being's meditating mind becomes a form-sphere consciousness, although their body remains a desire-realm body.

Each dhyāna has two parts: (1) the preparatory stages — also called "access" (*sāmantaka*) — of that dhyāna, and (2) the actual dhyāna that is attained upon the completion of its preparatory stages. To attain the actual first dhyāna, meditators must first accomplish its seven preparatory stages or preparations, which are first dhyāna spheres of consciousness. The seven preparations consist of the initial level of serenity, where one is called a "mere beginner," and the first six of the seven mental contemplations (*manaskāra*). Here, "serenity" refers to a form-sphere consciousness and a level of meditative equipoise. Serenity must be strengthened by repeated meditation before meditators proceed to the seven mental contemplations. *Śrāvaka Grounds* lays out the seven mental contemplations (LC 3:98):

> For the sake of freedom from the desire realm, diligent yogis use the seven types of mental contemplation and subsequently achieve their freedom. The seven types of mental contemplation are: the mental contemplations of (1) discernment of characteristics, (2) arisen from belief, (3) isolation, (4) delight or withdrawal, (5) analysis, (6) final training, and (7) the result of final training [which is the actual first dhyāna].

These seven can be practiced in terms of cultivating understanding of grossness and peacefulness or of the four truths. (1) *Grossness and peacefulness* refers to the disadvantages of the lower sphere of consciousness and the relative peacefulness of the present one. When mental contemplations are practiced for this aim, they are mundane paths practiced by Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike who want to deepen their meditative state. Both serenity and insight are employed: insight analyzes the grossness and peacefulness of the realms, and at the conclusion of analysis, serenity focuses one-pointedly on their relative grossness and peacefulness. (2) Buddhists practice the seven mental contemplations to cultivate understanding of the *four truths* in order to attain a supramundane path leading to nirvāṇa.

First we'll discuss the mental contemplations in terms of grossness and peacefulness as outlined by Asaṅga in *Śrāvaka Grounds*.

1. The *mental contemplation of discernment of characteristics* involves study and reflection on the individual characteristics of the desire realm and the first dhyāna, the former being gross and the latter peaceful. One becomes a beginner at purifying afflictions. Here meditators analyze the grossness of the desire realm: Sentient beings fight; they create all ten paths of nonvirtue. Their bodies are made of foul substances and their minds are filled with afflictions such as anger, resentment, jealousy, miserliness, and lack of integrity — qualities that are absent in the first dhyāna. They experience suffering when they are born, age, fall ill, and die, and in between birth and death they are dissatisfied, fearful, anxious, and despondent.

Having analyzed the defects of the desire realm, meditators analyze the peacefulness of the first dhyāna: Beings do not suffer from birth and aging. They have whatever they need, fulfill their desires without much effort, and experience contentment. No one engages in the ten paths of nonvirtue, so there are no wars over resources or honor. They have long lifespans and don't experience the horrible diseases that beings in the desire-realm face. Their environment is beautiful, embellished with spectacular buildings and jeweled grounds.

Meditators focus single-pointedly first on the grossness of the desire realm followed by the peacefulness of the first dhyāna; these two are their observed objects. Because it is difficult to analyze within the state of serenity, meditators alternate stabilizing and analytical meditation and again cultivate the nine sustained attentions, overcoming the five faults with the eight antidotes and employing the four powers and six engagements. Should restlessness start to arise, they emphasize stabilizing meditation; should laxity manifest, they emphasize analytical meditation.

Continuing to meditate, they gain mental and physical pliancy, the bliss of physical pliancy, and the bliss of mental pliancy, which is a special mental pliancy induced by analysis. This is a concentration that is a union of serenity and insight and is also the attainment of insight. The union of serenity and insight is so called because previously analysis interfered with the stability of serenity, and the stability of serenity interfered with analysis. Now there is no interference, and the stability at the end of analysis is a special kind of serenity. This marks passing on to the second mental contemplation.

2. The *mental contemplation arisen from belief* is so called because it arises from the belief derived from learning and thinking about grossness and peacefulness during the first mental contemplation. Both serenity and insight are used during these mental contemplations. Insight is cultivated by analyzing the grossness and peacefulness; at the end of analysis, serenity focuses on the grossness and peacefulness discerned through analysis. Meditators now gain the ability to abandon some of the desire-realm afflictions

through suppressing them by the power of concentration. This abandonment is temporary, for the afflictions are only completely abandoned by meditation uniting serenity and insight on emptiness.

Desire-realm afflictions are of nine grades. The three general grades are great, middling, and small. Each of these is divided in turn into great, middling, and small. The great-great afflictions are the coarsest ones and thus the easiest to abandon; the small-small are the most intractable and require more time and effort to abandon (see the chart "Grades of Afflictions of the Desire Realm" on page 226).

3. The *mental contemplation of isolation* arises from repeatedly cultivating the second mental contemplation viewing the desire realm as gross and the first dhyāna as peaceful with insight. When meditators can overpower the manifest form of the great-great root and auxiliary afflictions of the desire realm by the uninterrupted path that is their antidote, that marks the beginning of the third mental contemplation. This uninterrupted path views the desire realm as gross; it is immediately followed by a liberated path that views the first dhyāna as peaceful. The uninterrupted path is so called because it suppresses the manifest great-great afflictions of the desire realm so that these afflictions no longer cause any interruption. The liberated path is so called because it is liberated from those afflictions.

The mental contemplation of isolation has three uninterrupted paths and three liberated paths, one each for the great-great, middle-great, and the small-great levels of afflictions. An uninterrupted path, without break in meditation, becomes a liberated path when the suppression of each level of manifest afflictions is complete. This mental contemplation is so called because it's the first time meditators' minds are separated or isolated from the great afflictions of the desire realm. In addition to the uninterrupted paths and liberated paths, there is the mental contemplation of isolation that is neither. This is the meditation that occurs after one liberated path and before the next uninterrupted path that overcomes the next level of afflictions. For example, the uninterrupted path overcoming the great-great afflictions is seamlessly followed by the liberated path that has overcome them. Then the path that is neither occurs; here concentration is strengthened until it is strong enough to bring the uninterrupted path that overcomes the middle-great afflictions and so on.

4. The *mental contemplation of delight or withdrawal* also consists of three uninterrupted paths and three liberated paths. These abandon the three levels of middling afflictions. This mental contemplation is called "withdrawal" because the uninterrupted paths view the desire realm, shed attachment to it, and withdraw from its grossness. It is called "delight" because the liberated paths viewing the first dhyāna are free from the middling afflictions. As above, a mental contemplation of withdrawal or joy that is neither also exists.

5. The *mental contemplation of analysis* is so called because after having abandoned the first six levels of afflictions, meditators may think they have overcome all nine. To discern if that is the case, they analyze by imagining an object that could easily give rise to a desire-realm affliction and see if even a small affliction arises in response. Having detected that some desire-realm afflictions can still manifest, they continue their meditation.

6. The *mental contemplation of final training* has three uninterrupted paths and three liberated paths that overcome the three small afflictions. Between one liberated path and the next uninterrupted path, there is a mental contemplation of final training that is neither. The last liberated path suppresses the small-small desire-realm afflictions. The third, fourth, and sixth mental contemplations are the antidotes that suppress afflictions.

7. The *mental contemplation of the result of final training* is free of manifest desire-realm afflictions and occurs at the time of entering the first dhyāna. Since the afflictions have been suppressed but not destroyed and their seeds remain in the mindstream, one is not an ārya.

Jinaputra summarizes the seven mental contemplations in his commentary to Asaṅga's *Compendium of Knowledge* (ISBP 171):

> [The mental contemplation] of discernment of characteristics brings about a comprehensive understanding of what is to be abandoned and what is to be attained, and then directs the mind toward their respective abandonment and attainment. Following that, [the mental contemplation] arisen from belief takes up the correct practice. [The mental contemplation] of isolation abandons the great grades of afflictions. [The mental contemplation] of delight abandons the middle grades of afflictions. [The mental contemplation] of analysis places the mind in a state that is free of the exaggerated pride that believes [the goal] has been attained. [The mental contemplation] of final training abandons the small grades of afflictions. [The

mental contemplation] of the result of final training experiences the fruit of having meditated effectively on those [preceding six] mental contemplations.

In a manner that conforms to each specific instance, it should be understood that a description similar to the one that explains the seven mental contemplations that bring about the attainment of the first dhyāna applies to all the other meditative levels up to the [formless absorption of] neither-discrimination-nor-nondiscrimination.

The seven preparations should not be confused with the seven mental contemplations. The seven preparations consist of the initial level of serenity and the first six of the seven mental contemplations. The seven mental contemplations do not include the initial level of serenity and add the actual first dhyāna as the last mental contemplation. Serenity is found in all dhyānas and formless meditative absorptions.

Relationship between the Seven Preparations and Seven Mental Contemplations of the First Dhyāna

SEVEN PREPARATIONS (ACCESS)	SEVEN MENTAL CONTEMPLATIONS (ŚRĀVAKA GROUNDS)
1. mere beginner, which is the initial level of serenity	beginner at mental contemplation, which is the initial level of serenity
2. discernment of characteristics	1. discernment of characteristics (beginner at purifying afflictions)
3. arisen from belief	2. arisen from belief
4. isolation	3. isolation
5. delight or withdrawal	4. delight or withdrawal
6. analysis	5. analysis
7. final application	6. final training
The last liberated path is the actual first dhyāna.	7. result of final application (the actual first dhyāna)

Meditative Absorptions of the Form Realm

The first dhyāna is a meditative absorption because the mind and its associated mental factors operate equally on the object. While several mental factors are present, five are chief: two are antidotes, two are benefits, and one is the basis. Investigation (coarse engagement, *vitarka*, *vitakka*) and analysis (subtle engagement, *vicāra*, *vicāra*) are *antidotes* because they are the continuation of the investigation and analysis in the preparations that led to the abandonment of the faults of the desire realm. Investigation examines the nature of the observed object in a general way; analysis examines its attributes in detail.

The mental bliss that accompanies the mind of the first dhyāna performs two functions. From the perspective that it causes the mental consciousness and the other mental factors to be joyful, it is called joy (*prīti*, *pīti*). From the perspective that it makes the body blissful, it is called bliss (*sukha*). Joy and bliss are *benefits* because the meditator experiences the joy and bliss that come with having left behind the faults of the desire realm. One-pointedness (*ekāgratā*, *ekaggatā*) is the *basis* because it serves as the foundation of the other four mental factors. Together, these five are known as the "five absorption factors."

The meditative absorption of the first dhyāna is of two kinds. The *causal absorption of the first dhyāna* is attained in this life. If it has not degenerated when the meditator dies, it brings the *resultant-birth absorption of the first dhyāna*, and the meditator is born in the first dhyāna with the physical and mental aggregates of the first dhyāna. In this case, the seven mental contemplations of the first dhyāna are the second link of formative action — the invariable karma that projects rebirth in the first dhyāna. The ripened effect of that action is the aggregates of a being born in the first dhyāna. Once born in the first dhyāna, beings experience the environmental result — a pleasing environment — and causally concordant

results, such as a mind without the desire-realm afflictions. The process is the same when yogis are reborn in higher meditative absorptions.

The *causal meditative absorption* of the first dhyāna has two types. The first is a mere first dhyāna that has all five absorption factors; the second is the special first dhyāna that has separated from the coarser factor of investigation and has neutral feeling instead of joy and bliss.

The uninterrupted paths and liberated paths described above are mundane paths in that they only suppress manifest afflictions. They are not ārya paths that eradicate afflictions completely.

We may also speak about three types of causal meditative absorptions of the first dhyāna:

1. With the pure (*śuddha*) meditative absorption, meditators are free of all afflictions associated with the first dhyāna. When one initially attains the first dhyāna, it is pure; but later it may become afflictive if one of the afflictions of the first dhyāna — attachment, for example — arises in one's mind. Nevertheless, a pure meditative absorption is still polluted because afflictions have only been temporarily suppressed, not eradicated.
2. The unpolluted (*anāsrava*) meditative absorption is used by āryas as the basis for their path consciousness that eradicates afflictions.
3. The afflictive (*kliṣṭa*) is polluted by one or more of the afflictions of the first dhyāna. This dhyāna has five afflictions: attachment, view, arrogance, ignorance, and doubt. Experiencing the bliss of the first dhyāna, some meditators become *attached* to it. Generating one of the superknowledges, meditators see their previous lives and have the *view* of a permanent self. Thinking they are exceptional for having attained the first dhyāna, they may become *arrogant*. Being *ignorant*, they may *doubt* whether the first dhyāna is a path to liberation. Any of these makes the first dhyāna afflictive.

Meditators may now seek deeper states of absorption: the second, third, and fourth dhyānas of the form realm and then the four meditative absorptions (*samāpatti*) of the formless realm. To gain the other three dhyānas, meditators cultivate the seven mental contemplations for that dhyāna by contemplating the grossness of the lower dhyāna and the peacefulness of the higher one. Meditators suppress the three great, three middling, and three small levels of afflictions associated with the lower dhyāna by means of nine uninterrupted paths and nine liberated paths that abandon them as they advance through the seven mental contemplations for the next dhyāna. Similar to the first dhyāna, the second, third, and fourth dhyānas also have causal and resultant birth types of dhyānas and pure, unpolluted, and afflictive types.

The second dhyāna has four dhyānic factors: one antidotal, two benefits, and one basis. The antidotal factor is internal clarity (*adhyātmasamprasāda*). It includes the mental factors of mindfulness (*smṛti*), which remembers the observed object of the second dhyāna and its aspects; introspective awareness (*saṃprajanya*), which monitors whether the mind is focused on the object; and equanimity (*upekṣā*), which here has subdued the fluctuation caused by investigation and analysis in the first dhyāna.[58] The second dhyāna is now free from investigation and analysis. Its benefits are joy and bliss, although joy, being very exuberant, can sometimes agitate the mind. As with all four dhyānas, the basis is one-pointedness.

The third dhyāna has five dhyānic factors: three antidotal, one benefit, and one basis. The antidotal factors are mindfulness, introspective awareness, and equanimity, which together cause the mind to overcome attachment to the second dhyāna. Equanimity especially subdues the restlessness of joy, which is no longer present in the third dhyāna. Equanimity equalizes and balances the mind and its accompanying mental factors. The benefit factor is the bliss of the third dhyāna, which is not as disturbing as the bliss of the second dhyāna. The basis is single-pointed concentration.

The fourth dhyāna has four dhyānic factors: two antidotal (mindfulness and equanimity), one benefit (the equanimity that is a neutral feeling), and one basis (single-pointedness). Mindfulness, equanimity, and neutral feeling are now said to be thoroughly pure because meditators have relinquished eight faults that cause fluctuation in concentration: investigation, analysis, inhalation (*śvāsa*), exhalation (*praśvāsa*), physical pain (*duḥkha*) of the desire realm, mental unhappiness (*daurmanasya*) of the desire realm, mental happiness (*saumanasya*) up to and including the second dhyāna, and the feeling of bliss (*sukha*) of the third dhyāna. Equanimity has pacified these and balanced the mind, making the fourth dhyāna the best basis for attaining the path of seeing. Although the fourth dhyāna has introspective awareness, it is not listed because it is no longer necessary since the eight faults have been overcome. Having abandoned inhalation and exhalation, these meditators stop breathing while in deep meditative equipoise.

The first and second dhyānas differ in that although both are clear and stable, the power of the first dhyāna is incomplete due to investigation and analysis. When these are subdued in the second dhyāna, the power of concentration is complete. The second and third dhyānas differ in that the benefit is not complete in the former because both joy and bliss are present. When the joy and bliss of the second dhyāna are overcome and only the bliss of the third dhyāna remains, the factor of benefit is complete. The third and fourth dhyānas differ in that the faults of inhalation, exhalation, and the feeling of bliss remain in the former but are absent in the latter, bringing about the completion of thorough purity in the fourth dhyāna. Of all eight meditative absorptions, it is the one most suitable for attaining the excellent qualities of the three vehicles. Bodhisattvas in general rely on the concentrations of the dhyānas to generate excellent qualities; only bodhisattvas on the eighth ground and above have the power to use the formless absorptions for that purpose.

Principal Mental Factors in the Four Dhyānas

DHYĀNA	FACTORS PRESENT	NEWLY ABSENT FACTORS
1	2 antidotal: investigation, analysis 2 benefits: joy, bliss 1 basis: one-pointedness	
2	1 antidotal: internal clarity (includes mindfulness, introspective awareness, equanimity) 2 benefits: joy, bliss 1 basis: one-pointedness	investigation, analysis
3	3 antidotal: mindfulness, introspective awareness, equanimity 1 benefit: bliss 1 basis: one-pointedness	joy
4	2 antidotal: mindfulness, equanimity 1 benefit: equanimity that is a neutral feeling 1 basis: one-pointedness	inhalation, exhalation, pain, mental unhappiness, mental happiness, feeling of bliss

Meditative Absorptions of the Formless Realm

Meditators practicing the mundane path who have gained the fourth dhyāna may proceed to attain the four meditative absorptions of the formless realm: limitless space (*ākāśānantya*), limitless consciousness (*vijñānānantya*), nothingness (*ākiṃcanya*), and the peak of saṃsāra (*bhavāgra*). While the four dhyānas differ in terms of the presence or absence of different dhyānic factors, the four meditative absorptions of the formless realm are distinguished by their observed object. Also, whereas analysis is the prominent meditative activity in the four dhyānas, stabilization is the main meditation done in the four formless absorptions. The sense that the body is sinking under the earth is the sign of attaining any of the four dhyānas, whereas the sense that the body is flying in space is the sign of attaining any of the four formless absorptions.[59]

Each of the formless absorptions has seven mental contemplations where meditators analyze within a mind of serenity and focus on the lower dhyāna or absorption as gross and the discrimination of the upper one as peaceful. However, they principally engage in stabilizing meditation. They actualize nine uninterrupted paths and nine liberated paths, the last liberated path being the actual absorption they seek to attain. Each of the four formless absorptions has causal and resultant rebirth absorptions as well as pure, unpolluted, and afflictive types of absorption, although some say the peak of saṃsāra does not have an unpolluted absorption.

Practitioners who have attained the fourth dhyāna still have a sense of craving even though all attachment to objects of the desire realm have been abandoned. This occurs because obstructive contact is

still present in the dhyānas. Seeing this attachment as a fault, they strive for a state that is like space in which there is no obstructive contact. Taking this state as their meditation object, they view the fourth dhyāna as gross and focus one-pointedly on the thought, "Space is limitless." By meditating in this way, they attain the nine uninterrupted paths and nine liberated paths and then the actual *absorption of limitless space*. At this time the appearance of forms ceases and there is no perception of obstructions, such as walls or mountains, and no perception of variety, such as various colors and shapes. Meditators don't think that these no longer exist, rather they cultivate their nonappearance to the mind. Space exists everywhere.

Having attained the state of separation from obstruction and contact, they still have feeling, and again craving arises. In short, until self-grasping has been eliminated, as soon as there is an appearance, craving will arise in relation to it. So practitioners aspire to go beyond limitless space and seek the state of limitless consciousness. To attain the *absorption of limitless consciousness*, meditators focus on the absorption of limitless space as gross and the discrimination that consciousness is limitless as peaceful.

After a while, they begin to see the state of limitless consciousness as unsatisfactory and look for whatever is different from consciousness, be it material or immaterial. Not finding anything, they transcend the actual absorption of limitless consciousness and stay in the contemplation beyond this — a state in which there is absolutely nothing whatsoever. Drawn to the perception that there is nothing, they pursue it repeatedly, causing them to go beyond the preparations to nothingness to attain the actual absorption of nothingness. In short, to attain the *absorption of nothingness*, they focus on the discrimination that consciousness is limitless as gross and see the discrimination that there is nothing to apprehend that is material or immaterial as peaceful.

To attain the *absorption of the peak of saṃsāra*, meditators view the discrimination that there is nothing to apprehend as material or immaterial as gross and they cultivate the thought that coarse discrimination (of nothingness) doesn't exist, and subtle discrimination is not nonexistent. They release all coarse discrimination so only subtle discrimination remains. Cultivating the seven preparations, they suppress the nine grades of afflictions of nothingness and attain the meditative absorption of the peak of saṃsāra.

Beings in the formless realm have very long, peaceful lives, but after the karma for these rebirths has been exhausted, without choice they fall to lower levels of rebirth. It's like ascending to the top of the Eiffel Tower: the only way to go is down. Some people mistake the peace of rebirth in the formless realm for liberation, only to be horrified when they die and take rebirth in the desire realm again because they still have self-grasping ignorance. Dharmakīrti counsels (PV 221cd–222ab):

> Where there is grasping at self, there is the view of other.
>
> From this duality of self and other
>
> arise attachment and animosity.
>
> Due to this, all faults of cyclic existence ensue.

For this reason, it is essential to lay the foundation of a strong aspiration to be free from saṃsāra, knowledge of the paths and grounds leading to liberation and awakening, and reliance on a fully qualified spiritual mentor who can guide us.

Meditative Absorptions on the Four Truths

The methods to attain serenity, the dhyānas, and the formless absorptions are found in both Buddhism and Hinduism. Christians and followers of other faiths may also benefit from learning the techniques leading to serenity, and we can share these with them. Non-Buddhists who seek to attain the dhyānas and formless absorptions practice the mundane path of meditating on grossness and peacefulness as described above.

Buddhist teachers often caution their disciples from seeking the eight meditative absorptions without first having a clear aspiration to attain liberation or buddhahood. Their concern is that the disciples may easily become attached to the bliss and equanimity of those meditative states and cease to pursue their spiritual aim of nirvāṇa. Followers of the Mahāyāna, in particular, are strongly encouraged to emphasize the cultivation of bodhicitta so that they are not distracted by either the joys of saṃsāra or the bliss of the personal peace of arhatship. Nāgārjuna tells us (MMK 18.5a):

> Through the elimination of karma and affliction there is nirvana.

Buddhists who take this to heart do not follow the mundane path of grossness and peacefulness in order to attain higher rebirths in saṃsāra.[60] They instead seek the ultimate reality (*dharmatā*), nirvāṇa. Their aim is liberation or full awakening, and to attain these they must cultivate the union of serenity and insight on the four truths or on emptiness in order to generate the supramundane paths — the only paths that can eradicate the afflictive obscurations and cognitive obscurations.[61] The mental contemplations that focus on grossness and peacefulness used to attain the dhyānas are not suitable to do this. Tsongkhapa said (LC 3:101):

> Nowadays there is no one who uses these methods [of the mundane path of grossness and peacefulness] to accomplish the actual dhyānas and so on, so there is no one to lead you astray.

In Tibet meditators did not practice the meditation on grossness and peacefulness to attain rebirth in the form and formless realms. In this way, they did not get sidetracked by attachment to the bliss and equanimity of the meditative absorptions.

Asaṅga's *Śrāvaka Grounds* speaks of four types of people who do not practice the supramundane paths in that lifetime but proceed only by practicing the mundane path of meditation on grossness and peacefulness: (1) non-Buddhists because they do not understand the four truths, (2) Buddhists with dull faculties who have excessively emphasized meditation on serenity for a long time, (3) sharp-faculty Buddhists whose roots of virtue haven't completely ripened, and (4) bodhisattvas who defer their attainment of buddhahood to a future life and do not attain it in this life.

To attain liberation, it is not necessary to gain all the meditative absorptions of the form and formless realms. In fact, some of the lower absorptions may be more conducive for this. Tsongkhapa says (LC 3:95):

> Furthermore, even if you do not achieve the higher dhyānas of the form realm or meditative absorptions of the formless realm, but do achieve the serenity explained previously, which is included in the level of access to the first dhyāna, then you can achieve liberation — freedom from all the fetters of cyclic existence — by cultivating insight based on that serenity.

However, since buddhas' minds have perfected all excellent qualities limitlessly, they have mastered all the meditative absorptions.

The three vehicles are distinguished in terms of the method aspect of the path; according to the Prāsaṅgikas, followers of all three vehicles realize the same selflessness — the emptiness of inherent existence of all persons and phenomena. To achieve the union of serenity and insight on selflessness, cultivating concentration is essential. In this light, pursuing the dhyānas helps to enhance their concentration.

Practitioners unite serenity and insight and eradicate afflictions in different ways. Śrāvakas become arhats by passing through the five śrāvaka paths of accumulation, preparation, seeing, meditation and no-more-learning. However, they need not attain all four fruits of that path — the fruits of stream-enterer, once-returner, nonreturner, and arhat — because there are different ways to overcome the innate afflictions. To discuss this in-depth would take us into the complex topic of the Twenty Saṅghas.[62] This topic involves the many and varied ways that śrāvakas can attain arhatship, including the realms they abide in while practicing, the afflictions abandoned at different stages, their meditative attainments, and so forth. Texts present this topic in various ways, and scholars differ in their presentations as well. In addition, the topic can be presented in a detailed or abbreviated manner, which may sometimes sound different from each other even when the same scholar wrote both presentations. Below is one presentation explained briefly.

The afflictions to be abandoned are divided into eighty-one grades. Each of the nine levels — the desire realm, the four dhyānas, and the four formless absorptions — has three grades of afflictions — great, middle, and small. These three are further subdivided into three — the great-great, middle-great, and small-great afflictions — so there are nine afflictions for each level. The nine grades of afflictions for each of the four dhyānas and four formless absorptions are laid out similarly, for a total of eighty-one grades all together.

Grades of Afflictions of the Desire Realm

- Great
    1. Great-great

2. Middle-great
3. Small-great

- Middle
    1. Great-middle
    2. Middle-middle
    3. Small-middle
- Small
    1. Great-small
    2. Middle-small
    3. Small-small

These afflictions may be abandoned in two ways: The first is by temporarily suppressing them by means of the preparations for each successive dhyāna. The second is by eradicating them forever by means of the supramundane paths directly realizing selflessness. Someone may have temporarily suppressed a certain grade of afflictions by the power of their samādhi but not yet eradicated them by the power of their wisdom.

In *Śrāvaka Grounds*, Asaṅga describes how śrāvakas progressively develop the seven mental contemplations in relation to the four truths. The descriptions of the mental contemplations here differs from that for cultivating mundane insight.

1. The *mental contemplation of discernment of characteristics* involves learning, reflecting on, and analyzing the meaning of the sixteen aspects of the four truths as they apply to all rebirths in saṃsāra. This stage employs both the wisdom arising from hearing and the wisdom arising from reflection.
2. The *mental contemplation arisen from belief* is attained when analysis brings certainty regarding the four truths. This is gained through the cultivation of the wisdom arising from meditation and brings awareness of the full extent and nature of the four truths and evokes aversion toward true duḥkha and true origins. Nevertheless, a practitioner's mind still resists the peacefulness of nirvāṇa because of strong familiarization with sensory pleasure that has been present since beginningless time. Identifying the conceit "I am" as the source of this and applying the antidote to the conceit, a practitioner meditates on the subtle impermanence of the mindstream and cultivates a deeper understanding of the sixteen aspects of the four truths. She then develops awareness that the apprehending mind has the same nature as the apprehended meditation object, an understanding that arises on the heat level of the path of preparation. It is called "heat" because the fire of wisdom will consume the kindling of the afflictions in the future. Continued meditation brings the peak level, which is so called because it is the highest point of unstable virtue — that is, one could still fall back or take an unfortunate rebirth. More practice leads to attaining the third level of the path of preparation, fortitude, which is so called because the mind now strongly accepts four truths and there is no longer the possibility of backsliding. By continuing to examine the nature of the mind, the practitioner attains a mental state that seems to be without discrimination, as if the mind lacks an object and has ceased functioning, although it hasn't. This is the level of supreme Dharma, where one is on the verge of perceiving emptiness directly.
3. The *mental contemplation of isolation* is attained after the practitioner exerts herself with respect to four truths and generates a direct perceiver of the true nature of the four truths. This realization marks the advent of the path of seeing and heralds the destruction of afflictions that are to be abandoned on that path.
4. The next three mental contemplations are attained during the path of meditation. The *mental contemplation of analysis* examines what obstacles have been abandoned and what are yet to be abandoned.
5. With the *mental contemplation of delight* one continues to meditate, occasionally investigating what obstacles have and have not yet been abandoned, periodically generating aversion toward things for which the practitioner should feel aversion (the first two truths), and from time to time generating great delight toward things for which she should feel delight (the last two truths).[63]

6. Through practicing the mental contemplation of delight, the vajra-like concentration arises. It abandons all remaining afflictions to be abandoned by the path of seeing. This is the *mental contemplation of final training*.

7. The *mental contemplation of the result of final training* occurs after the vajra-like concentration has eradicated all remaining afflictive obscurations and arhatship has been attained.

With respect to the way śrāvakas proceed on the path to liberation, there are four types of śrāvaka āryas: simultaneous eliminators, leapers, gradual attainers, and gradual eliminators.[64]

Simultaneous eliminators attain only the fruits of stream-enterer and arhat, not the fruits of once-returner and nonreturner. They eradicate afflictions by using serenity as the basis for cultivating insight into emptiness. To do this they employ a preparation of the first dhyāna called the "capable preparation" (*anāgamya*), which is a mind of the form realm.[65] It is attained by first developing serenity and then alternating analytical and stabilizing meditation on emptiness to attain a similitude of insight. Continuing to meditate in this way, they attain a fully qualified insight — the capable preparation. It is so called because it is able to serve as the mental basis for supramundane paths — the unpolluted paths of seeing, meditation, and no-more-learning — that are the antidotes to afflictive obscurations of the three realms. The simultaneous eliminators easily abandon the eighty-one afflictions of the three realms using the capable preparation, because it abandons the great-great afflictions of all nine levels simultaneously, the middle-great afflictions of all nine levels simultaneously, and the small-great afflictions of all nine levels simultaneously, and so on through to the small-small afflictions of all nine levels. These śrāvakas go through nine uninterrupted paths and nine liberated paths.

Simultaneous eliminators have sharp faculties and attain nirvāṇa faster than the other types of śrāvaka āryas. However, the capable preparation alone cannot abandon the cognitive obscurations.

Leapers bypass one or more fruits. One type of leaper has suppressed between six and nine of the nine grades of desire-realm afflictions prior to entering the path of seeing. This enables them to leap over the fruit of stream-enterer and become a once-returner when they attain the path of seeing. The second type of leaper has suppressed all nine grades of desire-realm afflictions and leaps over both stream-entry and once-returner, becoming a nonreturner upon attaining the path of seeing.

Gradual attainers proceed gradually through all four fruits one after the other.

Gradual eliminators, like gradual attainers, sequentially suppress and eradicate the various grades of afflictions. However, some gradual eliminators attain all four fruits, some do not attain the fruit of stream-enterer, and some do not attain the fruits of stream-enterer and once-returner.

Some śrāvakas seek birth in one of the five pure abodes (T. *gnas gtsang ma*) in the form realm. To be born there, they engage in the alternating dhyāna meditation (T. *bsam gtan spel sgom*), which involves alternating between polluted (mundane) and unpolluted (supramundane) fourth dhyānas. In this way, they transmute previously created propelling karma that would lead to a rebirth in one of the first three levels of the fourth dhyāna so that it ripens instead as birth in one of the five pure abodes in the fourth dhyāna. These abodes are pure in the sense that birth there is not taken by polluted propelling karma, so only āryas are born there.[66] Vasubandhu explains the alternating dhyāna meditation (ADK 6:42–43ab):

> Initially, the fourth [dhyāna] is alternated.
>
> It is achieved by mixing instants.
>
> It is for the sake of being reborn and abiding
>
> as well as out of fear due to the afflictions.
>
> Because there are five types [of alternating dhyāna meditation],
>
> there are only five rebirths in pure places

Who practices or uses alternating dhyāna meditation? It is not practiced by ordinary beings, including those on the paths of accumulation and preparation, because it has an unpolluted component. In terms of āryas, it is not practiced by stream-enters or once-returners because they have not attained an actual dhyāna and are still liable to be born in the desire realm under the force of afflictions and karma.[67] Thus it must be nonreturners or arhats who practice alternating dhyāna meditation. Nonreturners do this practice to be reborn in a pure abode and attain nirvāṇa there. Sharp-faculty arhats are liberated, but do this practice to

gain a happy abiding in that life. Dull-faculty arhats do it to distance themselves from obscurations that relish the pleasant taste of concentration.

In which realms is this meditation done? It is practiced by beings in either the desire or form realms.

How many versions of the alternating dhyāna meditation are there? There are five, one corresponding to each of the five pure abodes: (1) small-three, (2) middling-six, (3) big-nine, (4) very-big-twelve, and (5) extremely-big-fifteen alternating dhyāna meditations.

How are they practiced? There are two phases: the preparation when meditators are training, and the actual practice after they have gained proficiency in the alternating dhyāna meditation. The following is the description for the small-three alternating dhyāna meditation.

Preparation: Āryas who aspire to do this practice initially abide continuously in the unpolluted actual fourth dhyāna, which is the most serviceable mind because it is free from the eight faults: investigation, analysis, inhalation, exhalation, physical pain of the desire realm, mental unhappiness of the desire realm, mental happiness up to and including the second dhyāna, and the bliss of the third dhyāna. That is followed by continually abiding in the polluted actual fourth dhyāna. After that, they continually abide in the unpolluted actual fourth dhyāna again. Initially they may take breaks between these periods of abiding. Eventually these periods of abiding become shorter, so that each of the three periods of abiding in the unpolluted, polluted, and unpolluted fourth dhyāna lasts only two moments.

Actual: once the meditators are trained as above, they do the same three-period alternation with one effort — that is, all in one go without a break.

What is the measure of having attained the alternating dhyāna meditation? Vaibhāṣikas say that it is the ability to abide in the unpolluted actual fourth dhyāna for one shortest moment, then abide in the polluted actual fourth dhyāna for a shortest moment, and finally abide in the unpolluted actual fourth dhyāna for one shortest moment. This entire sequence is done with one effort and lasts for only three shortest moments — a shortest moment is 1/64 of a fingersnap. Vasubandhu disagrees, saying only the Buddha can do this; he asserts that each phase lasts for a moment — that is, the length of time of a fingersnap. The Mahāyāna agrees with this.

What form does each of the five alternating dhyāna meditations take? The small-three is described above. The middling-six alternates the unpolluted actual fourth dhyāna with the polluted one to make six moments. The big-nine is nine moments, the very-big-twelve is twelve moments, and the extremely-big-fifteen alternating dhyāna meditation is fifteen moments of alternately abiding in the unpolluted and the polluted actual fourth dhyāna. To be able to go from unpolluted to polluted absorptions is extremely difficult, and to be able do this in the shortest moment is almost unimaginable. Yet these are the skills these diligent śrāvakas develop.

The small-three alternating dhyāna meditations bring birth in the lowest or first of the five pure abodes, Not Great; the middling-six in the second, Untroubled, and so on to the third, Beautiful; the fourth, Clear-Sighted; and the fifth, Highest Pure Abodes.

Asaṅga's *Bodhisattva Grounds* says that the dhyānas of bodhisattvas can be categorized as two: mundane and supramundane. Alternatively, they may also be classified in three: (1) dhyānas cultivated for happiness in this life, (2) dhyānas cultivated to attain the excellent qualities of concentration,[68] and (3) dhyānas cultivated to accomplish the welfare of sentient beings.[69]

Bodhisattvas seek to develop a mind that is serviceable, wise, and able to benefit others. For this purpose, they need knowledge of the various meditative absorptions, especially the fourth dhyāna, the best support to enter the Mahāyāna path of seeing. Since bodhisattvas are of different faculties and at different stages, they go about this accordingly. Those bodhisattvas who first became arhats through following the śrāvaka path have attained the dhyānas and formless absorptions during that path. Some scholars maintain that at the time of having eliminated all afflictive obscurations, śrāvaka arhats attain all eight meditative absorptions, in which case these bodhisattvas would have them.

New bodhisattvas who did not previously follow the śrāvaka path to arhatship could generate the fourth dhyāna in several ways. Sharp-faculty disciples who already have an inferential realization of emptiness now make effort to attain the concentrated mind of serenity. However, those who used a meditation object other than emptiness to attain serenity must gain the correct view of emptiness and then traverse the nine stages of sustained attention to gain serenity with emptiness as the object.

Bodhisattvas seek to suppress the afflictions in order to increase the clarity of insight and attain the supramundane paths. As the power of their minds increases as a result of meditating on emptiness for prolonged periods of time, they approach the level of the first dhyāna. Through persistent one-pointed meditation on emptiness, their minds become more stable and subtle, and they reach a level of experience whereby the afflictions of the desire realm have been suppressed. At that point it could be said that they have reached the first dhyana.

To determine that this is the case, they think of an object that would normally trigger manifest attachment to the sensual pleasures of the desire realm and check if such attachment arises in their minds. If not, they confirm to themselves that they have reached the first dhyāna or a state equivalent to it. They progress in a similar way, meditating on emptiness, and then testing to see if the particular afflictions corresponding to each subsequent meditative absorption arise in their mind. In that way, they confirm their level of meditative absorption.

After bodhisattvas have attained serenity on emptiness, they must unify serenity and insight on emptiness. This is necessary because otherwise the stability of serenity interferes with the analysis of insight, and analysis interferes with stability. To harmonize the two, based on having traversed the nine stages of sustained attention and attained serenity, they alternate stabilizing and analytical meditation on emptiness and again apply the four attentions until special pliancy is induced through the force of analysis. At that time, they attain fully qualified insight, a wisdom of thorough discrimination of phenomena conjoined with special pliancy induced by the power of analysis. The clarity of this mind is much greater than that of serenity alone, and its wisdom can penetrate emptiness more deeply. Since the one-pointedness of serenity continues to operate with insight, the mind that is the union of serenity and insight becomes very powerful. At this point there is the wisdom arisen from meditation, and the path of preparation is attained.

When, with the fourth dhyāna, bodhisattvas realize emptiness directly, they attain the path of seeing and begin to gradually eradicate the afflictive obscurations and then the cognitive obscurations. Eradicating defilements so they can never arise again goes far beyond merely temporarily suppressing them on the mundane path.

Some masters and scriptures point to yet another path whereby Buddhist meditators deepen their concentration and progress to the fourth dhyāna. This is by contemplating the first two truths — for example, true duḥkha and true origins of the desire realm as gross and the remaining two truths of the desire realm as peaceful. Here their meditation object is the four truths and their sixteen attributes.

Bodhisattvas can attain a concentration called the "stream of Dharma" (T. *chos rgyun gyi ting nge 'dzin*) on the great stage of the path of accumulation. This samādhi is concomitant with mindfulness and wisdom, and by entering it bodhisattvas can listen to the teachings of innumerable buddhas in various buddha fields without ever forgetting them. They can even hear teachings given by a supreme emanation body without needing to be physically near that buddha.

The fifth chapter of the *Ornament of Clear Realizations* explains that to attain this concentration, bodhisattvas sequentially develop each meditative absorption up to the peak of saṃsāra. After meditating in each absorption in the ascending order, they descend in reverse order, and then meditate upward sequentially to the fourth dhyāna, where they then attain the ultimate fourth dhyāna (T. *rab mtha'i bsam gtan bzhi pa*). Some people say bodhisattvas attain this meditative ability by meditating on grossness and peacefulness; others say it may be attained with emptiness as one's meditation object.[70] In either case, by the great stage of the path of accumulation, bodhisattvas have attained all eight meditative absorptions.

Causes to attain the concentration of the stream of Dharma are hard to accumulate. We must have a union of serenity and insight that has a special ability to hear teachings from a supreme emanation body. In addition, we must have heard many teachings, collected merit and wisdom for a long time, purified obscurations to directly seeing buddhas and hearing the Dharma from them, and gained correct views and pure ethics.

Bodhisattvas following the Perfection Vehicle or the three lower tantras (action, performance, and yoga tantra) attain serenity first, followed by insight. Insight itself is the union of serenity and insight.

Bodhisattvas who enter highest yoga tantra without having previously become an arhat may do so with the mental basis of the capable preparation. They do not seek to suppress the afflictions of the desire realm or attain the first dhyāna because they employ desire on the path.

If bodhisattvas have not already attained the union of serenity and insight, they may do so using special techniques in highest yoga tantra on the basis of having either the Cittamātrin or Madhyamaka view of emptiness.[71] After meditating on emptiness during the *coarse generation stage*, practitioners imagine that their wisdom understanding emptiness manifests in the form of the deity and the mandala. With analytical meditation, they meditate on the clear appearance of themselves as the deity, and with stabilizing meditation, they focus on the divine dignity of being a deity who is empty of inherent existence. To remedy laxity and restlessness, they focus on a subtle drop at the upper or lower tip of the central channel, respectively. The coarse generation stage is completed when the meditator can maintain concentration on the entire mandala and its deities as well as the subtle deities on the sense bases for four hours.

During the *subtle generation stage*, yogis visualize the mandala and its deities — all of them being empty of inherent existence — in a subtle drop at the upper or lower tips of the central channel. They attain the union of serenity and insight by visualizing the mandala deities emanating from and then reabsorbing into the mandala deities in this subtle drop. Emanating the deities subsumes analytical meditation; their reabsorption subsumes stabilizing meditation. In this way, analytical and stabilizing meditation are done at the same time with one consciousness, not alternately as in the Perfection Vehicle. This unique quality of highest yoga tantra enables serenity and insight to be attained simultaneously, at which time the subtle generation stage is complete.

REFLECTION

1. What are the three realms and how do they relate to the three spheres of consciousness?
2. What are the principal mental factors present in each of the four dhyānas? What are their functions and why are some of them abandoned as concentration deepens?
3. What is the difference in outcome between developing insight by contemplating grossness and peacefulness, and by contemplating the aspects of the four truths?

The Eight Liberations

The Buddha spoke of eight liberations (*vimokṣa*, *vimokkha*, T. *rnam thar*), which are deep states of concentration. Here "liberation" does not mean freedom from saṃsāra — which is the meaning of *vimukti* (*vimutti*, T. *rnam grol*) — but the mind's temporary release from defilements, which is brought about by developing particular meditative skills.

Sanskrit Tradition

In the Sanskrit tradition, the eight liberations are explained in the *Mahāvibhāṣā*, the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā Śāstra*, and the *Ornament of Clear Realizations* and its commentaries.[72] There is some difference in the presentation of the eight liberations and nine serial absorptions in various texts. The *Ornament of Clear Realizations* defines these liberations as exalted knowers that are not polluted by the afflictions of their own level. They are practiced in order to abandon the obscurations to absorption. When practiced by bodhisattvas, the first three liberations are called the "three paths of emanation" because by abandoning attachment to forms, they eliminate obstacles to emanating many forms that fulfill the needs of sentient beings. Ārya bodhisattvas can generate the eight liberations into supramundane paths, although the first seven can also be found in the continuums of non-āryas.

1. *Liberation of that having form viewing forms*: Depending on an actual dhyāna, a yogi emanates many forms while her own body remains visible to others.

2. *Liberation of that not having form viewing forms*: Depending on an actual dhyāna and considering herself as formless and having only the four mental aggregates, a yogi emanates many forms while her body is not visible to others.

3. *Liberation of the attractive that eliminates obstacles*: Depending on an actual dhyāna, a yogi counteracts his preference to emanate beautiful forms and his dislike of emanating unattractive ones. All forms appear to him as attractive.

The first two liberations eliminate obscurations to emanating forms and the third eliminates the fault of liking beautiful forms and disliking unattractive ones. These are practiced by bodhisattvas on the great stage

of the Mahāyāna path of accumulation and above. When practiced by śrāvakas, these three liberations depend on a dhyāna or a formless meditative absorption as a support and are attained by nonreturners who manifest a body and by arhats who are free from afflictive obscurations and obscurations to absorption.

The next five liberations are called the "five paths of abiding happily in the present life."[73]

4–7. The *liberations of infinite space*, *infinite consciousness*, *nothingness*, *and neither-discrimination-nor-nondiscrimination* are the four meditative absorptions of the formless realm. In this context, these four absorptions are ones that act as a cause for a path of liberation and abide in accordance with unpolluted liberation. They are called "liberations" because they are free from the manifest afflictions of their corresponding levels. Although ārya bodhisattvas may meditate with the four formless absorptions, they do not take rebirth in these realms because they have exhausted the polluted karma that would cause this and because they cannot benefit the sentient beings born there.

8. The *liberation of cessation* is a meditative equipoise existing in the continuum of āryas meditating on emptiness by depending on both a supramundane path and a mind of the peak of saṃsāra. It is a consciousness in which coarse feelings and discriminations associated with the mental consciousness have ceased. By stopping these, as well as other coarse consciousnesses and mental factors, yogis stop the afflictions that arise in association with them, rendering the mind very peaceful. Through practicing in this way meditators increase their meditative pliancy and agility and abandon the obscurations to ceasing discriminations and feelings.

The liberation of cessation differs from the *absorption of cessation* (*nirodha-samāpatti*), which is an abstract composite in an ārya's continuum. It is not a consciousness, but is the state in which coarse feelings and discriminations associated with the subtle primary mental consciousness have ceased by the power of a supramundane path. It is the same as the cessation of discrimination and feeling (*saṃjñā-vedayita-nirodha*, *saññā-vedayita-nirodha*). It is not an actual absorption, but is called one because it arises dependent on meditating in a meditative absorption.

Śrāvaka meditators absorb in the last five liberations in order to abide happily in the present life; bodhisattvas practice them for the benefit of others. The first seven liberations show a progressive refinement of samādhi, while the eighth liberation requires both concentration and insight. All eight liberations can be attained only by those who have entered a path and who possess an actual dhyāna,[74] but only nonreturners and arhats who have mastered the four dhyānas and four formless absorptions and ārya bodhisattvas can attain the eighth liberation.

Pāli Tradition

The eight liberations are enumerated in MN 77:22 and DN 16:3.33 and are described in the *Paṭisambhidāmagga* in the Khuddaka Nikāya and the *Aṭṭhasālinī* by Buddhaghosa.[75]

1. The embodied looking at form: the attainment of the four dhyānas using a kasiṇa derived from a color in one's own body. Meditators perceive themselves as embodied, and using a color found on their body as the initial object of meditation — the color of their hair, blood, eyes, and so forth — they generate the learning and counterpart signs[76] and attain dhyāna.

2. The formless looking at a form: the attainment of the dhyānas using a kasiṇa derived from an external object, such as the four elements. Meditators perceive themselves as disembodied and enter a dhyāna by using an external color as a kasiṇa. To progress from the first to the second liberation, they release some degree of conceit and attachment regarding their own physical appearance, and before progressing to the third liberation, they do the same regarding others' bodies.

3. Resolved only upon the beautiful that eliminates obstacles: the attainment of the dhyānas through using either a very pure and beautiful colored kasiṇa or the four brahmavihāras as the object of meditation. The first two liberations lead to perceiving the body as foul, and the third releases any excessive disgust by focusing on a beautiful object. When cultivating the four immeasurables as a liberation of mind, meditators see sentient beings as attractive.

4–7. The four formless absorptions that lead meditators to experience a pleasant abiding in this life. Meditators enter the first absorption by transcending all perceptions of form. They enter the last three by surmounting the object of the preceding absorption.

8. The attainment of cessation of discrimination and feeling, also called the absorption of cessation, is an absence of all manifest activity of the six consciousnesses. Attained by the combination of serenity and insight, it is accessible only by nonreturners and arhats who have mastered the preceding meditative absorptions.

To attain it, Pāli commentators say the meditator enters the first dhyāna. After emerging from it, she applies insight to contemplate the dhyāna factors as impermanent, duḥkha, and no-self. She then enters the second dhyāna, and upon emerging from it, she similarly analyzes its factors in terms of the three characteristics. She continues like this up through the absorption of nothingness. In this way, she both accomplishes these meditative absorptions and develops insight wisdom regarding them. Having emerged from the absorption of nothingness and contemplated its factors as impermanent, duḥkha, and no-self, she makes the resolution to enter the cessation of discrimination and feeling. Before entering that cessation, she determines how long she wants to remain in it; this can be from a short time up to seven days. If she is a monastic, she resolves that if the Saṅgha needs her, she will automatically emerge from this absorption.

She then enters the absorption on the base of neither-discrimination-nor-nondiscrimination (the peak of saṃsāra), and from there goes into the cessation of discrimination and feeling in which all mental functions stop for the predetermined length of time. When this time is over, she emerges from that state and mental functions resume. Bhikkhunī Dhammadinnā explained (MN 44.16–21) that the meditator does not think, I will attain the cessation of discrimination and feeling, I am attaining this, or I have attained it. Later, she does not think, I will emerge from the cessation of discrimination and feeling, I am emerging from it, or I have emerged from it. All this is accomplished by force of the determination made prior to that meditation session.

As with anyone in the fourth dhyāna and above, this meditator's breath stops when entering the cessation of discrimination and feeling. There are stories in the scriptures of arhats in this meditative state who were mistaken as dead by people who saw them. When they tried to cremate the body, it would not burn. When emerging from this state, the first consciousness to arise is the fruition consciousness of either a nonreturner or arhat that has nirvāṇa as its object.

The cessation of discrimination and feeling is considered an exalted state and the highest of all samādhis. It is not a support for higher attainments because arhats also enter it, so it's not clear why this state would be sought. Nonetheless, offerings made to those who have just emerged from the cessation of discrimination and feeling are said to create special great merit. For this reason, Mahākāśyapa would often enter this absorption for a short while before going on alms round to benefit those who offered food to him.

The Nine Serial Absorptions

The nine serial absorptions are spoken of in the *Ornament of Clear Realizations* and its commentaries. Also called the nine abidings in equipoise, these nine are the serial absorptions of the four dhyānas, the four meditative absorptions of the formless realm, and the absorption of cessation. The Sanskrit tradition considers the first eight supramundane paths.

The nine serial absorptions are so called because meditators must initially attain them successively in their forward order. After having mastered all nine in both ascending and descending order, they train to enter them in a leap-over manner. This is done in order to develop mental dexterity, and on that basis to cultivate many other abilities leading up to the capabilities of a buddha.

The leap-over meditative absorption (*vyukrāntaka-samāpatti*) is presented differently in the *Ornament of Clear Realization* and the *Treasury of Knowledge* (ADK 8:18cd–8:19ab):

> Join the two types to the eight levels.
>
> Leap over one through going and coming.
>
> Proceed to the third dissimilar type.
>
> This is the leaping meditative absorption.

This meditation is done by arhats who are human beings; they have clear minds, lack afflictions, and have control over their concentration so they can unwaveringly engage in this practice. The eight levels are

the four dhyānas and four formless absorptions. The two types are the polluted and unpolluted, which are to be joined with the eight levels.

First meditators develop the ability to absorb in the polluted eight absorptions in the ascending order from the polluted first dhyāna to the polluted peak of saṃsāra, and in the descending order from the polluted peak of saṃsāra to the polluted first dhyāna. They then do the same using the eight unpolluted absorptions. This is known as the "long preparation."

Next, they do the short preparation. They absorb in a polluted first dhyāna, after which they leap over the second dhyāna and absorb in a polluted third dhyāna. They then leap over the fourth dhyāna and absorb in polluted infinite space, followed by leaping over infinite consciousness and absorbing in polluted nothingness. They then descend to the polluted first concentration in the same leap-over fashion. Here all the absorptions are polluted or mundane ones. This is followed by doing the same using unpolluted, supramundane absorptions.

Finally, they do the actual leap-over absorption. First they absorb in a polluted first dhyāna, leap over the second dhyāna, and absorb in an unpolluted third dhyāna. They leap over the fourth dhyāna and enter a polluted infinite space absorption, leap over infinite consciousness and enter an unpolluted nothingness absorption, and then descend in the same manner.[77]

There are other ways to do the leap-over absorption — for example, starting with the unpolluted first dhyāna, leaping over the second dhyāna and absorbing in a polluted third dhyāna, leaping the fourth dhyāna, entering an unpolluted infinite space, and so on in the ascending and descending fashion. In addition, meditators can begin with the polluted second dhyāna, leap over the third dhyāna, and enter the unpolluted fourth dhyāna, ascending in this manner to the peak of saṃsāra and then descending again. There are many more ways to do this meditation as well. The meditative dexterity of these yogis is amazing!

Another version of the leap-over meditative absorption is described in Maitreya's *Ornament of Clear Realizations* (5:24–25). This is done by bodhisattvas on the path of meditation to develop a very flexible mind and to perfect the meditative absorptions.

> Having gone and come in the nine meditative absorptions,
>
> including cessation in the two aspects,
>
> a consciousness included in the desire [realm] not in meditative equipoise
>
> is taken as the boundary,
>
> whereupon one enters in absorption in the manner of leap-over,
>
> leaping over one, two, three, four,
>
> five, six, seven, and eight,
>
> going variously until entering into absorption of cessation.

In the context of the leap-over meditation, the eight meditative absorptions are minds realizing emptiness, and the absorption of cessation is an abstract composite. The desire-realm mind focuses on the attributes of the desire realm — forms, sounds, and so forth — and is a coarse mind.

To prepare, bodhisattvas first master all eight meditative absorptions (the four dhyānas and four formless absorptions) in their ascending order, as well as the absorption of cessation. This is followed by entering all nine in the descending order, beginning with the absorption of cessation and ending with the first dhyāna.

Next, they meditate successively on the eight meditative absorptions in the ascending order, beginning with the actual first dhyāna. In between each of the eight, they enter the absorption of cessation, so the sequence is first dhyāna, absorption of cessation, second dhyāna, absorption of cessation, and so on up to the peak of saṃsāra, followed by absorption of cessation.

Between the ascending and descending sequences, sharp-faculty bodhisattvas enter a desire-realm mind that is a bridge between the two sequences. Being sharp faculty, they can go from the very subtle, refined absorption of cessation to this very coarse bridge-desire-realm mind, and then to the absorption of cessation that initiates the descending sequence. For dull-faculty bodhisattvas, this is too difficult, so after completing the ascending order, they enter a mind called the "peak of saṃsāra of small capacity," which is a

little coarser than the peak of saṃsāra, and from there enter the bridge-desire-realm mind. They then begin the descending sequence.

In the descending order, the nine serial absorptions are alternated with a desire-realm mind. Bodhisattvas enter the absorption of cessation, desire-realm mind, peak of saṃsāra, desire-realm mind, nothingness, desire-realm mind, and so on down to first dhyāna, desire-realm mind.

When they become fully proficient in this, meditators can use either the absorption of cessation or the desire-realm mind as the interwoven state as they sequentially ascend and descend the eight meditative absorptions.[78] Before entering the leap-over meditation, bodhisattvas set their intention, "After entering absorption, I will go from the first dhyāna to the absorption of cessation, and so forth." In that way, they can pass from one absorption to the next in the ascending sequence while remaining in meditative equipoise.

There are thirty-four leap-over bases. In the ascending order, there are sixteen bases — the eight meditative absorptions and eight absorptions of cessation that are in between them. In the descending order, there are eighteen bases because all nine serial absorptions alternate with a desire-realm mind. This makes a total of thirty-four.

In the verse above, it is said that the bodhisattvas *leap over one, two, three*, and so forth because during the meditative absorptions the mind is focused in deep single-pointed meditation. Meditators emerge from that and have a desire-realm mind that is a coarse, nonequipoise mind. When they enter the next absorption, they must leap over the previous one (two, three, and so on) absorption. For example, in the descending order, they go from absorption of cessation to desire-realm mind. To enter the next absorption, they must leap over the absorption of cessation to directly enter the peak of saṃsāra. Alternating a subtle, equipoise mind and a coarse, nonequipoise mind is extremely difficult, and the ability to do this makes the meditative abilities of these bodhisattvas truly remarkable. How they train their minds and the abilities they gain from doing so are an indication of how powerful our minds can be as a result of correct practice done with a Dharma motivation.

The difference between the serial absorptions and the eight liberations is a matter of emphasis. The liberations are spoken of from the viewpoint of being free from certain obscurations; the serial absorptions emphasize that the body, mind, and mental factors are in equilibrium.

In the chapters on the higher training in concentration we have learned of the astounding abilities that sincere meditators can develop. We may wonder why they are explained to those of us who are beginners — won't some people be discouraged by their own comparatively feeble concentration when they see how far they have to go? This depends on our perspective. Learning about the capacities of the human mind inspires us; we know that if we put in the same time and effort as past meditators have, that we too can actualize abilities like theirs. In addition, knowing that there are Buddhist meditators who have already attained these abilities gives us a better idea of the Saṅgha that is our object of refuge; faith and respect in them automatically arises in our mind. As a side benefit, if we have the tendency toward spiritual arrogance, learning of these advanced practices checks our pride, suppressing that hindrance to spiritual progress.

The Superknowledges

The principal aim of the Buddha's teachings is to stop duḥkha by stopping rebirth under the influence of ignorance, afflictions, and karma and to attain nirvāṇa, or full awakening. Nevertheless, the sūtras present other spiritual accomplishments that are valued as well. The first of these is mastery over the various dimensions of the mind — the dhyānas and formless absorptions — that are accomplished by means of samādhi. Scriptures frequently praise the peace and ease these mental states bring. They were sought after and attained by many non-Buddhist spiritual seekers from the Buddha's time to the present.

Another spiritual accomplishment praised in the scriptures is the superknowledges (*abhijñā*, *abhiññā*), supernormal physical and mental powers through which meditators can perform feats that ordinary people consider miraculous or preternatural because they cannot be explained by either the science of old or modern-day science. These special abilities are a by-product of samādhi and give meditators access to hidden laws of the material world that can only be known through refined states of meditative absorption.

Like mastery of dimensions of the mind, the superknowledges can be attained by non-Buddhists as well as Buddhists. While some spiritual seekers hold them as the purpose of the path, the Buddha sees them as a by-product of deep concentration. He emphasized to his disciples that they should not be content with

attaining the various meditative absorptions or supernormal abilities, because without the attainment of nirvāṇa they are still susceptible to all forms of saṃsāric duḥkha. For this reason, when Buddhists cultivate these abilities, it is of utmost importance to have a motivation to benefit others. Otherwise they risk falling prey to conceit and clinging and will find themselves in unfortunate rebirths in future lives.

For example, a meditator in Tibet had deep concentration and could maintain the visualization of himself as the wrathful deity Yamāntaka. But since he lacked the aspiration for liberation, he did not cultivate wisdom and in his next rebirth was born as a spirit that looked like Yamāntaka. There is also a story of a novice who could fly. Since his determination to attain liberation was not strong, one day when he heard the enchanting singing of a maiden working in the fields below, he fell in love and disrobed to marry her. On the other hand, practitioners who use supernormal powers with compassion to benefit others and to spread the Buddha's teachings enact great benefit.

Although the Buddha taught all three aims — nirvāṇa, mastery over dimensions of the mind, and the superknowledges — he knew his followers had different aptitudes and interests and did not expect all of his disciples to accomplish the latter two. These arhats who attain nirvāṇa but not the other two are called "those liberated by only wisdom" (P. *paññāvimutta*). They attain liberation either by using the capable preparation or by developing wisdom and eradicating defilements simply on the basis of access concentration.[79] Those who attain nirvāṇa as well as the four dhyānas, four formless absorptions, and perhaps even the cessation of discrimination and feeling have mastery of a wide range of mental states and are called "those liberated in both ways" (P. *ubhatobhāgavimutta*). Disciples who attain nirvāṇa as well as mastery over mental states and the superknowledges are called "arhats with the six superknowledges." In countries following the Pāli tradition, they say that we find all three types of persons to this day.

In short, although the superknowledges are not a sign of insight or wisdom, Buddhist texts do consider them a sign of spiritual accomplishment. In the Buddha's time, many yogis had these abilities and would even challenge the Buddha to contests in miraculous powers. One of the four special Buddhist days in the Tibetan calendar — the full moon of the first lunar month — celebrates the Buddha's victory in one such contest. After a group of non-Buddhist yogis kept prodding the Buddha to participate in such a contest, he reluctantly consented. His purpose was to subdue their arrogance, and by showing extraordinary miraculous powers he successfully did this, and they later became his disciples.

To meet the expectations of society at that time, some of the Buddha's disciples accomplished supernormal powers, but the Buddha prohibited his followers from displaying these powers to show off. In fact, monastics who speak even truthfully about their supernormal powers transgress a prātimokṣa precept. Those who lie about having powers they do not have commit a root offense. Throughout the ages, the Buddha's disciples with these abilities have used them to work in unobtrusive ways to benefit others and to spread the Dharma.

A sūtra tells the story of the layman Kevaddha who asked the Buddha to increase the faith of the laypeople by demonstrating his supernormal abilities, but the Buddha refused. Kevaddha then asked him to display his ability to read others' minds, which the Buddha also declined. Instead he showed Kevaddha another type of miracle (DN 11.8).

> And what is the miracle of instruction? Here, Kevaddha, a monastic gives instructions as follows: "Consider in this way, don't consider in that way. Direct your mind this way, not that way. Give up that, gain this, and persevere in it."

The true miracle is being able to instruct others and inspire their faith in the Dharma so that they may be led away from duḥkha and attain nirvāṇa.

When used with a good motivation — such as to attain liberation or awakening, or to benefit sentient beings with great compassion — these powers allow us to accumulate merit and generate wisdom quickly. They enable bodhisattvas to benefit sentient beings easily and exactly according to their needs. The first five superknowledges are mundane abilities: supernormal powers, divine ear, understanding the minds of others, recollection of past lives, and divine eye. The sixth superknowledge is a supramundane realization — the destruction of pollutants.

While non-Buddhists may actualize the first five, only Buddhists who seek liberation from saṃsāra seek the sixth — the attainment of liberation. The last three superknowledges — recollection of past lives, divine eye (knowledge of the passing away and rebirth of beings according to their karma), and destruction of the pollutants — are also the three higher knowledges that the Buddha actualized under the bodhi tree prior to

his awakening. In the Pāli tradition, sometimes two other powers — knowledge and vision and mind-made body — are included at the beginning of the list of superknowledges, bringing the total to eight.[80]

The Sanskrit tradition asserts that the first five superknowledges can be attained on the basis of the actual first dhyāna. The Pāli tradition says the actual fourth dhyāna is required because the mind is very pliant and concentration is strong and imperturbable.

1. *Supernormal Powers*

Training for the five superknowledges is rigorous, but when the mind is developed in this way, it is able to have mastery over nature and defy ordinary scientific laws. The Buddha describes meditators with such powers (MN 77.31):

> Having been one, they become many; having been many, they become one; they appear and vanish; they go unhindered through walls, through enclosures, through mountains, as though through space. They dive in and out of the earth as though it were water; they walk on water without sinking, as though it were earth. Seated cross-legged, they travel in space like birds. With their hands they touch and stroke the moon and sun, so powerful and mighty. They wield bodily mastery even as far as the Brahmā world.

People with supernormal powers (*ṛddhi*, *iddhi*) can make their body into many bodies and then absorb these diverse bodies back into a single body. They can make themselves invisible, vanishing and reappearing at will. They pass through solid materials with ease, walk on water, fly in space, and even touch the sun and moon.

The *Path of Purification* describes the process to develop these powers, which is done by means of samādhi developed in a series of preliminary exercises with the kasiṇas (S. *kṛtsna*) — colored disks or different elements — as meditation objects. With the earth kasiṇa as an object, meditators first attain the first dhyāna. They then attain the first dhyāna successively using seven other kasiṇas — water, fire, air, blue, red, yellow, and white. Then they do this in reverse, entering the first dhyāna beginning with a white kasiṇa, then yellow, red, blue, air, fire, water, and earth kasiṇa. After that, they enter the first dhyāna using each kasiṇa in sequential and reverse orders many times.

Then beginning with the earth kasiṇa, they attain each of the four dhyānas and the four formless absorptions in succession. From the absorption of neither-discrimination-nor-nondiscrimination (peak of saṃsāra) they descend, absorption by absorption, to the first dhyāna, still using the earth kasiṇa. They then practice going in and out of each dhyāna very quickly in forward and reverse orders, using the earth kasiṇa. When this has been mastered, they proceed to do the same with each of the other seven kasiṇas in turn, so that they have mastered all eight meditative absorptions with these eight kasiṇas in forward and reverse orders.

Following this, they alternate dhyānas. Using the earth kasiṇa they attain the first dhyāna, third dhyāna, infinite space, and nothingness. They then do this with each of the other seven kasiṇas. They also train so that they can enter the first dhyāna with one kasiṇa, the second dhyāna with another kasiṇa, the third with yet another, up to the absorption of neither-discrimination-nor-nondiscrimination.

Having mastered this, they now go from absorption on neither-discrimination-nor-nondiscrimination down to the first dhyāna, using a different kasiṇa to attain each absorption. They develop the ability to go into the first dhyāna quickly, stay for a moment, emerge from it, and, using another kasiṇa, go into the second dhyāna, stay in it a moment, emerge from it, and so on up to the absorption of neither-discrimination-nor-nondiscrimination, and then back down to the first dhyāna. In this way, they build up amazing mastery of the mind, entering and emerging from deep states of absorption in a few seconds. This preparatory process develops extraordinary mental power, which is then used to direct the mind to the exercise of the supernormal powers. Through the force of their intention, and based on this profound acuity and agility in samādhi, they gain the supernormal powers described above.

One of these is the ability to create a mind-made body (*manomaya-kāya*) in which the dhyānic mind creates another physical body that is an exact replica of the meditator's own body with all its limbs and sense faculties. The Buddha describes it as like a reed extracted from a sheath, a sword pulled out of its scabbard, or a snake removed from its slough (MN 77.30). Once the mind-made body has been extracted from the physical body, the meditator mentally controls it because it has no mind of its own, even though to others it looks as if it is a normal body moved by its own consciousness. This mind-made body can travel

to distant places while the meditator remains at the monastery. It can appear to teach Dharma elsewhere, and when it has served its purpose, the meditator absorbs it back into his own body.

2. *Divine Ear* (*Clairaudience*)

With the divine ear, meditators can hear sounds in the heavenly realm, human world, and other realms and directions where sentient beings dwell. They can hear sounds, listen to conversations, and hear cries of pleasure or pain that are far away as easily as ones nearby (MN 77.32).

> With the divine ear element, which is purified and surpasses the human, they hear both kinds of sounds, the divine and the human, those that are far as well as near.

3. *Understanding the Minds of Others*

With this superknowledge, meditators know (MN 77.33):

> the way to understand the minds of other beings, of other persons, having encompassed them with their own minds. They understand a mind affected by lust as affected by lust and a mind unaffected by lust as unaffected by lust; they understand a mind affected by hate as affected by hate and a mind unaffected by hate as unaffected by hate; they understand a mind affected by confusion as affected by confusion and a mind unaffected by confusion as unaffected by confusion; they understand a contracted mind as contracted and a distracted mind as distracted; they understand an exalted mind as exalted and an unexalted mind as unexalted; they understand a surpassed mind as surpassed and an unsurpassed mind as unsurpassed; they understand a concentrated mind as concentrated and an unconcentrated mind as unconcentrated; they understand a liberated mind as liberated and an unliberated mind as unliberated.

With this superknowledge meditators know the mental states of others as clearly as they see a spot on their own face reflected in a clean, bright mirror. For example, if another person's mind is affected by attachment or anger, they know it as such. If it is free from those, they also know that.

4. *Recollection of Past Lives*

Meditators with this superknowledge know (MN 77.34):

> the way to recollect their manifold past lives, that is, one birth, two births ... a hundred thousand births, many eons of world-contraction and expansion: "There I was so named, of such a clan, with such an appearance, such was my nutriment, such my experience of pleasure and pain, such my lifespan, and passing away from there, I reappeared elsewhere; and there too I was so named ... and passing away from there I reappeared here." Thus with their aspects and particulars they recollect their manifold past lives.

This superknowledge gives meditators the ability to know particular details of their previous lives from long ago. The *Path of Purification* says to develop this ability, a meditator must first master the dhyānas up to the fourth dhyāna, bringing the mind to imperturbability. Because the dhyānas are states of single-pointed concentration on one object, remembering previous lives, which involves turning the mind to many objects, cannot be done while in the fourth dhyāna itself. Meditators emerge from the fourth dhyāna into a state of ordinary consciousness, where the mind is still suffused with the power and clarity of the dhyāna. They begin by recalling what took place just before their meditation session, then remember what happened before that, gradually extending their memory as far back as possible to events from childhood and infancy. It isn't necessary to remember every detail of every day; sometimes they remember larger segments of their lives, such as being a young adult or an adolescent. Whenever their memory becomes cloudy, they pause and enter the fourth dhyāna to refresh, strengthen, and purify their mind. Reemerging from this dhyāna, they take up recollecting events in their life from where they left off, going back to the time of birth, life in the womb, and up to the time of conception, when the consciousness first entered the union of egg and sperm of this life.

At this time, it seems as if they come up against a wall and cannot remember further back. But without giving up, they again enter the fourth dhyāna to refresh the mind and make it focused, sharp, and clear. Emerging from that dhyāna, they again try to recall what happened in the moment before rebirth. They

apply their mind with determination to break through the wall that obstructs memory until eventually the concentrated mind is able to penetrate the fog of forgetfulness and recollect the last moment of the previous life (or the bardo). They continue progressing back in time, gradually remembering events from the previous life. Again encountering the wall of obscuration when they reach the beginning of that life, they persevere, sharpening and purifying the mind by entering the fourth dhyāna for a period of time. They then resume the recollection process until they can recall the second preceding life. And so on, they practice, developing the ability to remember vividly thousands, if not millions or billions, of previous lives.

5. *Divine Eye* (*Clairvoyance*)

The divine eye gives meditators access to the death and rebirth of sentient beings (MN 77.35).

> With the divine eye, which is purified and surpasses the human, they see beings passing away and reappearing, inferior and superior, fair and ugly, fortunate and unfortunate. They understand how beings pass on according to their actions thus: "These worthy beings who were ill-conducted in body, speech, and mind, revilers of ariyas, wrong in their views, giving effect to wrong view in their actions, on the dissolution of the body, after death, have reappeared in a state of deprivation, in a bad destination … but these worthy beings who were well-conducted in body, speech, and mind, not revilers of ariyas, right in their views, giving effect to right view in their actions, on the dissolution of the body, after death, have reappeared in a good destination, even in the heavenly world … they understand how beings pass on according to their actions.

The attainment of the divine eye, which sees beings dying and reappearing in their next life according to their karma, brings several special abilities. They understand clearly how sentient beings are governed and controlled by their karma. They know the actions sentient beings did to cause rebirth in particular realms during specific lives. They have the ability to see events in other realms in the universe, in places far away, and in other dimensions that our normal eyes are not privy to.

For a Dharma teacher, this ability is especially useful, for she can see various beings and their karma and thus knows their unique dispositions and how to skillfully benefit them. There are many stories in the sūtras of the Buddha knowing by means of his divine eye which beings were receptive to the Dharma at that time and whose faculties were ripe to gain realizations if they were taught. By knowing which beings in other realms or universes are ripe to be led on the Dharma path, bodhisattvas with supernormal powers can go to those places to teach them.

The divine eye is attained by using the light kasiṇa to enter the fourth dhyāna.[81] Having developed a luminous mind, they emerge from this dhyāna and turn this inner perception of light outward, using their clear and powerful minds to radiate this bright light that illuminates ever greater distances and extends to other realms of existence.

Sometimes while extending light further, the mind becomes dull and the light cannot penetrate to reveal those realms and events. At that time meditators again cultivate concentration with the light kasiṇa and use it to enter the fourth dhyāna. When their mind is refreshed and clear, they emerge from that dhyāna and resume radiating the light.

Eventually this powerful samādhi can illuminate other realms that are ordinarily concealed, and meditators can see devas, hungry ghosts, hell beings, as well as human beings and animals in other parts of the universe. Fixing their attention on particular beings, they inquire: What is the karma that brought this being to be born in this realm of existence? By the power of the divine eye, they gain direct understanding of this karma. They see that those beings in unfortunate realms were born there owing to the power of specific destructive actions and that those in fortunate realms attained such rebirths due to constructive actions. Some future events may become apparent as well.

6. *Destruction of Pollutants*

The sūtra says (MN 77.36):

> By realizing for themselves with direct knowledge, they here and now enter upon and abide in the liberation of mind and liberation by wisdom that are unpolluted with the destruction of the pollutants.

According to the Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka view, this superknowledge is concomitant with the concentration and wisdom that abandon afflictive obscurations; it directly knows these abandonments. It is possessed by āryas who have exhaustively abandoned all afflictive obscurations. This includes śrāvaka arhats and bodhisattvas of the pure grounds — the eighth, ninth, and tenth grounds — and buddhas. In the mindstreams of buddhas this superknowledge knows their abandonments of both the afflictive and the cognitive obscurations.[82]

According to Pāli commentaries, unlike the other superknowledges, the destruction of pollutants is possessed only by arhats. It may be attained on the basis of access concentration, the momentary concentration of "dry-insight" meditators, or any of the four dhyānas. Dry-insight arhats are so called because their wisdom lacks the softening and moistening effects of the dhyānas that make the mind more receptive. Although such wisdom is "hard," it can still eradicate defilements.

This superknowledge realizes a liberation called the "liberation of mind and liberation by wisdom" (P. *cetovimutti-paññāvimutti*), which is free from defilements. When the pollutants — the fundamental defilements obscuring the mind — have been uprooted by wisdom, a meditator enters upon and dwells in the liberation of mind liberation by wisdom. The liberation of mind is the concentration factor associated with the fruition attainment of arhatship because it is free from attachment. Liberation by wisdom is the wisdom factor associated with the fruition attainment of arhatship because it is free from ignorance. The former is primarily the result of serenity and the latter is primarily the result of insight, but coupled together like this, they refer to the fruition attainment of arhatship made accessible by the destruction of the pollutants. The fruition attainment of arhatship (P. *arahattaphala-samāpatti*) is a special meditative attainment accessible to an arhat, by which he directly experiences nirvāṇa through the duration of the attainment.

The Value of the Superknowledges for Bodhisattvas

Although some śrāvakas choose to develop the first five superknowledges, others do not. However, these are crucial for bodhisattvas because they enable bodhisattvas to accumulate great merit that is dedicated to full awakening and they enable both bodhisattvas and buddhas to be of great benefit to sentient beings. With *supernormal powers*, bodhisattvas go to pure lands where they listen to Dharma teachings directly from various buddhas. In pure lands, they create enormous merit by emanating abundant and magnificent offerings that they offer to the buddhas and bodhisattvas there. In the human realm, buddhas and bodhisattvas benefit others by revealing these powers to specific disciples to enhance their faith and joyous effort. They do so discreetly, with no wish to gain reputation or fame. Buddhas and bodhisattvas can also manifest many bodies, appearing as ordinary individuals in diverse places to teach and guide the beings there. In addition, these miraculous abilities enable bodhisattvas to know where the spiritual mentors, Dharma friends, and disciples with whom they have karmic connections are living and to go there quickly to either receive or give teachings and guidance.

By means of *clairaudience*, bodhisattvas can hear teachings in other places and understand all languages. This enables them to understand a wide range of teachings and to know their students' Dharma discussions. With this knowledge, bodhisattvas have the ability to resolve their students' doubts and dispel their misconceptions.

Through *knowledge of others' minds*, bodhisattvas directly know others' interests and dispositions as well as their emotional patterns and habitual thoughts, and thus can teach them accordingly. They know whose mind is under the influence of afflictions and whose is free from afflictions. Cherishing others more than themselves, bodhisattvas are never judgmental when they see that someone's mind is overcome with afflictions. Instead, their compassion and determination to help that person increase.

By means of *knowing past lives*, bodhisattvas know their spiritual mentors, Dharma practices, and spiritual friends from previous lives and thus seek them out again in this life. Studying and practicing under the guidance of teachers with whom they have associated and in whom they have deep trust and faith from previous lives, and continuing practices in which they have already trained in previous lives enables them to progress rapidly. In addition, they know the disciples with whom they have had Dharma connections in previous lives and continue to guide and teach them. By clearly seeing the karma that their disciples have created in the past, these bodhisattvas understand their disciples' present experiences and tendencies and know how to guide them effectively.

The *divine eye* enables bodhisattvas to know others' karmic tendencies as well as where they have been reborn. They also know the karmic results of actions that people are doing now, which helps them to guide their disciples more effectively. Clairvoyance gives bodhisattvas the ability to discern sentient beings' karmic receptivity to the Dharma and to interact with them accordingly. It also enables them to locate their previous disciples and benefit them in their present life forms. Understanding others' minds, bodhisattvas know who has entered the path and their level of realization as well as who has not entered the path, and thus can guide all these beings accordingly.

With *knowledge of the destruction of pollutants*, bodhisattvas of the pure grounds know their own level of spiritual attainments, fortifying their confidence in their ability to benefit others.

In short, some of the superknowledges involve extrasensory perception — perception by means other than our five senses; others involve supernormal powers — special physical powers that affect how one's body interacts with the surrounding environment.

* * * * *

Since we are discussing these special abilities that most people do not have, I would like to make a few comments. When I posed questions to my senior tutor, Kyabje Ling Rinpoche, he would sometimes give strange answers. I began to suspect that he had other sources of knowledge, so once I asked him, "Do you have clairvoyant experiences?" He responded, "I don't know, but sometimes certain unusual types of knowledge seem to arise in me." Ling Rinpoche was a knowledgeable spiritual master with great integrity, and I had known him since I was a child. Therefore I trust him and believe that clairvoyance and other superknowledges exist.

Theoretically, the ability to know is a natural property of consciousness. Even in our ordinary experiences, we sometimes have premonitions of what might happen. I think these indicate that the seed for such cognitive powers lies within us. Through meditative practices and single-pointed concentration in particular, we begin to sharpen the focus of our memory and mindfulness, increasing our ability to recollect experiences. As the power of recollection becomes sharper, the potential for precognition is enhanced as well. This is the theoretical basis for believing in precognition.

These abilities seem to arise in different forms in different people. In the eighteenth century, during the time of the Seventh Dalai Lama, a highly realized master named Dagpu Lobsang Tenpe Gyaltsen was universally recognized as having clairvoyant powers. Changya Rolpay Dorje, another great master, asked him, "How does this knowledge arise in you?" Dagpu Lobsang Tenpe Gyaltsen replied, "Whenever I have to seriously think about something, I focus on the first image that appears in my mind. This is usually a bell. On top of that appears certain images and patterns that give me particular premonitions."

Teachings of the highest yoga tantra contain specific practices that enable people to develop that kind of power. The sūtras also speak of extrasensory perception, but that is usually only visual and auditory, never olfactory. Even in our ordinary experiences we can cognize objects at a distance through our visual and audio perceptions, though we can't do this for odors. The power of clairvoyance is limited to visual forms.

While extrasensory perception and supernormal powers are possible, the Buddha forbade his disciples to talk about their accomplishments in this area. One of the precepts of a fully ordained monastic is to abandon publicly proclaiming that one is an arhat or has special abilities. This is to ensure that practitioners remain humble.

Some people claim to have superknowledges, but personally I am very skeptical. Because of misconceptions originating centuries ago, some people believe that many Tibetan monastics have special powers. When I visited Taiwan, I warned some of the Tibetan teachers and monks there not to pretend to have realizations or special powers that they did not possess, because one day their pretense might be revealed.

Some ordinary people may have some ability to know future events or someone's thoughts. When these abilities are a result of previous karma — not of samādhi developed in this life — they are generally limited in scope and are lost at death. They do not protect the people who possess them from falling into unfortunate rebirths and do not indicate that they possess spiritual realizations. Furthermore, these special abilities do not necessarily propel them along the path to awakening and sometimes become a distraction to spiritual practice. In some cases, a person may believe they have extrasensory perception when in fact they do not. In this case, telling others what they intuit could be inaccurate and harmful. This is especially true if they give unasked-for advice.

Some people may gain extrasensory perception or supernormal powers through single-pointed concentration. When used with compassion to benefit others, some special abilities are constructive. But if those people have not cultivated compassion, there is danger that they use those powers to gain respect, material gain, or power over others, in which case such powers are useless at best and harmful at worst. The goal of the Buddhist path is not to gain supernormal powers but to attain liberation and awakening. Therefore these special abilities must be cultivated with the proper motivation, and practitioners must know that until they become fully awakened buddhas their extrasensory perception and supernormal powers are not complete and may be erroneous.

REFLECTION

1. What are the six superknowledges? What are their functions?
2. Reflect on the ways bodhisattvas use each superknowledge with compassion to benefit sentient beings.

Serenity in Buddhist Practice

What makes the cultivation of serenity a Buddhist practice? The most important criterion is that it is held by refuge in the Three Jewels. What allows serenity to lead to nirvāṇa and awakening? When the union of serenity and insight is coupled with the aspiration for liberation and the wisdom realizing emptiness, it leads to nirvāṇa; when it is conjoined with bodhicitta and the wisdom realizing emptiness, the union of serenity and insight leads to full awakening. To ensure that our practice of serenity contributes to our ultimate spiritual aims, we should not seek meditative concentration to the exclusion of other practices, especially when we are relatively new to Dharma practice. Analytical meditation on the stages of the path is necessary to cultivate a proper motivation and a firm foundation for practicing both serenity and insight.

There is a story of a meditator who spent so many years absorbed in the bliss of samādhi that his hair grew into long dreadlocks. When he eventually arose from meditation, he noticed that some mice had nested in his hair. Furious, he swatted the mice and chased them away. Although this meditator had firm concentration, he lacked fortitude, such that a small provocation triggered a huge outburst of anger.

Most of our daily meditation practices involve both analytical and stabilizing meditation. To develop compassion we employ analytical meditation to understand the kindness of others and their suffering in saṃsāra. When compassion arises, we focus on that experience with stabilizing meditation. Should compassion weaken, engaging in more analysis will reinvigorate it, at which point we resume stabilizing meditation on compassion. Most meditation on the stages of the path is done by alternating analytical meditation and stabilizing meditation in this way.

During meditative absorption, a meditator may temporarily pass beyond manifest afflictions, but the enemy of afflictions will still surface in post-meditation time. For this reason, we must not be satisfied with the bliss of concentration but must develop insight into emptiness as well, for only that will free us from saṃsāra. However, without the powerful concentration of serenity or the dhyānas, our understanding of emptiness will lack sufficient strength to serve as a counterforce to self-grasping ignorance. Repeatedly entering into the realization of emptiness with single-pointed concentration is required to make the mind strong enough to uproot ignorance. This involves the union of serenity and insight on emptiness.

That union is a state imbued with physical and mental pliancy induced by analytical meditation on emptiness. Concentration alone can focus single-pointedly on emptiness, but analysis interrupts the stability of concentration. Analysis can plunge the depth of emptiness, but alone it cannot focus on emptiness single-pointedly. Uniting the two involves analysis being able to induce the physical and mental pliancy that brings deep concentration. Tsongkhapa says (LC 3:24):

> Discerning wisdom becomes insight when, without focusing on a single object, it can generate pliancy through the power of analysis. So generating pliancy by setting your attention on a single object of meditation — even if the object is emptiness — is nothing more than a way to achieve serenity; that alone does not count as attaining insight.

Meditating with pliancy and concentration on emptiness is serenity meditation. To become insight focused on emptiness — which itself is considered the union of serenity and insight — analysis must induce the pliancy of serenity.

The sequence of first meditating on serenity and then insight pertains to when these two are being newly attained. After meditators have gained both of them, they can begin a meditation session with serenity followed by insight, or they may directly enter into insight.

Although attainment of serenity precedes attainment of insight, that does not mean that we should wait until we have full serenity before studying and contemplating the correct view. It is good to seek teachings on emptiness and gain familiarity with it as soon as we have a general understanding of the path.

In the Perfection Vehicle and the practice of the three lower tantras (Action, Performance, and Yoga Tantra), serenity must be attained first. Although a meditator may have serenity, the stabilizing meditation of serenity and the analytical meditation of insight interfere with each other. They must be practiced alternately until analysis itself can induce the pliancy of serenity. At that time, the union of serenity and insight is attained. When this powerful mind has emptiness as its object, the meditator enters the path of preparation. As mentioned, the process of attaining serenity and insight in highest yoga tantra differs.

Words of Advice

I would like to speak now to those who have completed many years of study in the monastic universities. It seems that some Tibetan Buddhists belittle serenity perhaps because it is a practice shared with non-Buddhists or perhaps because they are concerned with becoming attached to the bliss of concentration. Holding this attitude, they neglect trying to improve their concentration. They may be well-educated lamas who are able to teach topics from the beginning to the end of the path, yet because they lack single-pointed concentration they cannot experience what they teach. The experiences described in Tsongkhapa's *Bright Lamp of the Five Stages* (*Rim nga gsal sdron*) and *Completing the Five Stages in a Single Seating* (*Rim nga gdan rdzogs*) are readily available for us to relish, yet we haven't devoted the time and energy to attain serenity and these higher attainments evade us.

The lengthy texts on the lamrim are designed to facilitate systematic practice of the topics explained in the classical treatises and commentaries, and as such they should be our primary guide for Dharma practice. But some people forget this and use the classical treatises to increase their intellectual understanding rather than incorporating them into the lamrim practice. Other lamas may not read the lamrim extensively and teach it simply because it is customary to do so. On the other hand, I have heard of some monks that meditate on the lamrim while they study the treatises at the monastic universities. That is excellent!

Some people do retreats and recite many mantras. Although this is good, practitioners in retreat should meditate on the teachings they have received. The autobiography of Jamyang Shepa, one of the great lineage lamas, relates that he did retreat on the 173 aspects of the three knowers as taught in the *Ornament*. It would be good if more people did serious meditation on these and other topics taught in the Indian treatises and commentaries.

The disciplinarian of one monastic university suggested that periods of silent meditation be incorporated into the daily prayer sessions and pujas, and I enthusiastically agreed. Pabongkha Rinpoche used to remain in silent meditation on emptiness at the point of taking death as the path to the dharmakāya when he did deity yoga practices. I have advised Namgyal Monastery to do this as well, instead of chanting "Everything becomes empty" and "Within emptiness arises ..." in the same breath.

Our monasteries must produce people who are accomplished meditators as well as skilled scholars. To this end, I suggest that monastic institutions establish some colleges for meditation practice. I also appeal to the new generation of monastics to put more effort into gaining personal experience of serenity and insight in order to preserve the realized Dharma and benefit sentient beings.

9 | Concentration in the Pāli Tradition

Within the Pāli tradition, there are various approaches to the development of serenity[83] and insight. According to the Majjhima Nikāya Commentary (II 346), serenity includes the eight meditative absorptions that are the basis for insight. Some teachers advocate cultivating serenity and insight separately and combining them afterward. Of those, some emphasize developing serenity first, followed by insight, while others teach insight first, followed by samādhi. Still other meditation masters instruct their disciples to develop serenity and insight together. Teachers also have different preferences for meditation objects.

It is important to train in samādhi under the guidance of a qualified teacher and not to do these practices on our own. Working with the mind is a delicate venture and without proper guidance it is easy to go astray. A good meditation master who understands the various experiences that may arise in meditation will be able to steer you in the correct direction and confirm your progress. This enables you to practice free from worry and prevents taking unnecessary detours on the path.

Objects of Meditation

Depending on the disciple's temperament, a meditation teacher usually prescribes one of forty objects for the cultivation of serenity. There are six kinds of temperament: those who are attached, angry, confused, faithful, intelligent, and speculative and scattered. These temperaments depend on a person's habits and the balance of humors in their body. A teacher discerns disciples' temperament by observing their posture, the way they walk, eat, wear their clothes, and engage in daily actions.

These are the forty possible meditation objects (Vism 3.104):[84]

- The ten kaṣinas are earth, water, fire, air, blue, yellow, red, white, light, and limited-space kaṣinas.[85]
- The ten unattractive objects are corpses in various states of decay. Unlike the meditation on corpses in mindfulness of the body where the purpose is to understand our own impermanence, here the purpose is to focus single-pointedly on the object with no reflective thought.
- The ten recollections are the recollection or mindfulness of the Buddha, Dharma, Saṅgha, ethical conduct, generosity, deities (the divine qualities of devas), death, the body, breathing, and nirvāṇa.
- The four divine abidings (four immeasurables) are love, compassion, empathic joy, and equanimity.
- The four formless states are the bases of infinite space, infinite consciousness, nothingness, and neither-discrimination-nor-nondiscrimination. These are the meditation objects of those born in the formless realm.
- One discrimination is discerning the repulsiveness of food.
- One analysis is defining the four elements.

Of these forty, twenty-two have the counterpart sign as the object: the ten kasiṇas, ten unattractive objects, mindfulness of breathing, and mindfulness of the body. This means the actual object when serenity is attained is the counterpart sign — a clear, luminous mental image or conceptual appearance, which is an object only of mental consciousness. Although we may begin by focusing on the breath, for example, the breath is not the actual object perceived in states of deep concentration; the sign (*nimitta*) is.

Of these forty, eight recollections (omitting mindfulness of the body and of breathing), the discrimination of the repulsiveness of food, and the defining of the four elements bring access concentration (P. *upacāra samādhi*) only. All the others will bring full absorption (P. *appanā samādhi*). Any of the kasiṇas is a condition for cultivating the first five superknowledges.

A beginner initially apprehends the various objects in different ways. All the kasiṇas, except the air kasiṇa, are initially apprehended by sight. For example, the earth kasiṇa is a round disk made of clean clay about four fingers wide. It is braced up and placed on a board in front of the meditator.

The ten unattractive objects are also first seen with the eyes. In previous times meditators went to charnel grounds to view these. The body's innards are known by hearing descriptions of them. The breath is apprehended by the tactile consciousness, the air kasiṇa by sight and touch, and the remaining objects by hearing a description of them. Beginners cannot apprehend the divine abiding of equanimity or the four formless states; only experienced meditators are able to engage with those objects.

The forty objects can be correlated with the various temperaments. If we are aware of our overall temperament, we can get a sense of the type of object that it would be most beneficial for us to focus on. If we have a lot of attachment, using the ten ugly objects and the body is helpful to reduce attachment and focus the mind. If we suffer from anger, the four divine abidings and the four color kasiṇas are useful. Those who are confused or scattered find the breath a helpful meditation object. Someone inclined toward faith will find the first six recollections riveting. Death, nirvāṇa, defining the four elements, and repulsiveness of food are useful for the intelligent. The other kasiṇas and the four formless states can be used by all.

Before going to a quiet place to practice, we should fully dedicate ourselves to the Buddha, thinking, I give my life to the Buddha. Doing this strengthens the mind, so if we encounter something frightening we will not run into town, socialize with a lot of people, or give up our practice. Instead, even if a fearful image appears, we won't be alarmed because we have dedicated ourselves to the Buddha.

A good motivation — one that seeks to gain realizations on the path to arhatship — is also important, as is a strong determination to confront and work with the afflictions. We should then request our spiritual mentor to select a meditation object for us and receive instructions on how to develop serenity with it as a base. Rushing

off to an isolated place with a lot of enthusiasm but no knowledge on how to meditate will not lead to fulfillment of our spiritual aims.

At the beginning of a meditation session, review the disadvantages of sensual desire and cultivate the wish to be free from it. Recollect the qualities of the Three Jewels and feel joyful. Reflect that you are entering the path of renunciation that all āryas have followed. Feel eager to meditate, knowing that by doing this you will gain the bliss of Dharma realizations.

In the process of developing serenity, three signs (P. *nimitta*) are to be cultivated: the preliminary sign (P. *parikkamma-nimitta*), learning sign (P. *uggaha-nimitta*), and counterpart sign (P. *paṭibhāga-nimitta*). Using the example of an earth kasiṇa, first make the kasiṇa disk by filling a wooden rim — approximately twelve to eighteen inches in diameter — with clay, smoothing the clay to get the sense of earth. Place the disk on a stand or raised platform in front of your meditation seat, about two feet away or at any distance that feels comfortable. The disk may be lower than your head or directly in front of you.

With eyes open, look at it, thinking, earth, earth. When the image of earth is firm in your mind, lower your eyes and continue to focus and think, earth, earth. Don't ignore the color of the earth, but don't give it prominence either, because the actual object of meditation is the conceptual appearance of earth, which is an object of mental consciousness, not visual consciousness. This mental image is called the *preliminary sign*; the mental consciousness conceptually apprehends the earth kasiṇa seen by the visual consciousness. If the mental image fades, look at the earth kasiṇa to refresh your visualization of it and then lower your eyes and visualize it.

Gradually you will be able to form the image in your mind, sometimes with your eyes open and sometimes with them closed. This is called *developing the sign*. Concentration at this initial stage is called "preliminary concentration" (P. *parikkamma-samādhi*), and most of your effort goes toward being mindful of the object, noticing when a distraction or other hindrance has arisen, applying

the antidote to it, and bringing the mind back to the meditation object.

Continue to develop the preliminary sign until the *learning sign* arises. This is a subtler object that replaces the preliminary work sign. It arises when you see the mental image just as clearly with closed eyes as with open eyes looking at the kasiṇa. At this point stop looking at the external earth kasiṇa and focus exclusively on the mental object, the learning sign. If your apprehension of the learning sign isn't stable and fades away, open your eyes and look at the physical earth kasiṇa. Investigation is important at this point to establish familiarity with the learning sign.

As you continue to meditate, the five hindrances are gradually suppressed by the five absorption factors (discussed below). Suppression in the context of developing concentration differs from psychological suppression. Here the mind and body are at ease and free from stress; the mind is virtuous and the feeling is either happy or equanimous. Unlike psychological suppression in which the person does not see his mental functioning clearly, here suppression of the five hindrances leads to greater clarity and ability to discern the functioning of the mind.

Untroubled by manifest afflictions, especially by the five hindrances, the mind becomes more concentrated. The *counterpart sign* arises and access concentration is attained. The difference between the learning sign and the counterpart sign is that the former has imperfections and flaws, whereas the latter is brighter and more purified. Very luminous, beautiful, and vivid, the counterpart sign is immaterial and lacks physical color or shape because it is not an object of visual consciousness. It is likened to a looking-glass disk taken out of its case, a very clean mother-of-pearl dish, or the moon coming out from behind a cloud. Stabilizing the counterpart sign is difficult, so you must guard it carefully and practice it over time in order to attain full absorption.

Access concentration begins when the counterpart sign arises and the five hindrances have been suppressed.[86] This is called the "stage of suppression abandonment" (P. *vikkhambhana-pahāna*). The first dhyāna begins with the stable and full development of the

five absorption factors. Although the absorption factors are present in access concentration, they are not firm and access concentration may easily be lost, which may be likened to a toddler falling down while learning to walk. But just as an adult can stand firmly for a long time, the absorption factors remain strong for a long time during actual meditative absorption. The mind in full absorption does not perceive sensory objects.

Nowadays in Asia, few masters are familiar with kasiṇa meditation and most meditators use the breath as the object for cultivating serenity. Focusing on the breath slows down the thought processes and clears the mind of the barrage of scattered thoughts. To use the breath as your meditation object, begin by placing your attention at the nostrils and upper lip and observing the physical sensation of the breath as it enters and exits.[87] Some people recite "buddho" to help them maintain focus on the breath, thinking "bud" when inhaling and "dho" while exhaling. The learning sign is a mental image arisen from this physical sensation. When it arises, turn your attention to that nimitta that has arisen based on the breath — a colored luminous sphere or a radiant light — and make that your object of meditation.

The Four Brahmavihāras

The practice of the four immeasurables (P. *appamaññā*), or four brahmavihāras — love, compassion, joy, and equanimity — is common to the Pāli and the Sanskrit traditions. This practice may be done in diverse contexts and for different purposes: to soothe rough emotions, develop serenity, aid in the cultivation of bodhicitta, and so on. In several sūtras, the Buddha presented the four brahmavihāras as a means to cultivate samādhi (DN 13.76).

> The ariya disciple — who is thus devoid of covetousness, devoid of malice, unconfused, introspectively aware, ever mindful — dwells pervading one quarter (direction) with a mind imbued with love, likewise the second quarter, the third quarter, and the fourth quarter. Thus above, below, across, and everywhere, and to all as to himself,

> he dwells pervading the entire world with a mind imbued with love, vast, exalted, measureless, without hostility, without malice.
>
> The ariya disciple … dwells pervading the entire world with a mind imbued with compassion, vast, exalted, measureless, without hostility, without malice.
>
> The ariya disciple … dwells pervading the entire world with a mind imbued with altruistic joy, vast, exalted, measureless, without hostility, without malice.
>
> The ariya disciple — who is thus devoid of covetousness, devoid of malice, unconfused, introspectively aware, ever mindful — dwells pervading one quarter with a mind imbued with equanimity, likewise the second quarter, the third quarter, and the fourth quarter. Thus above, below, across, and everywhere, and to all as to himself, he dwells pervading the entire world with a mind imbued with equanimity, vast, exalted, measureless, without hostility, without malice.

The four brahmavihāras are practiced in conjunction with mindfulness and are used to cultivate samādhi. Before meditating on them, it is necessary to shed animosity for others by seeing the danger of holding onto anger, hatred, and resentment.[88] Recall that if these people were happy, they would act differently. People harm others because they are unhappy; therefore it makes sense to wish them to have a peaceful mind and good circumstances in their lives.

Love is the wish for beings to have happiness and its causes. Before beginning, consider what happiness is and what the actual causes for happiness are. Happiness does not refer exclusively to the feeling of security brought about by external objects — possessions, reputation, family, and so forth — but rather to a sense of peaceful well-being and contentment in any circumstance. Then generate a sense of love (*mettā*) for yourself, wishing yourself happiness and its causes. For some people this comes easily, but others must first let

go of feelings of unworthiness by contemplating that each and every sentient being is worthy of happiness. Wish yourself to have the requisites for life and especially wish yourself to have the happiness that comes through mental transformation and Dharma practice.

On this basis, now extend love to someone you respect. When that is stable, extend it to friends and radiate love to them. Continue by extending love to people toward whom you feel neutral. Even though they may be strangers, they want happiness with the same intensity that you do. When that feeling is stable, think of beings with whom you have a contentious relationship, where there is conflict or distrust. As your love becomes more powerful, radiate it outward to include more and more beings. Finally, spread love to all sentient beings in all directions and realms.

When barriers to extending love to the five groups — yourself, the respected person, friend, neutral person, and hostile person — have been broken down and you are able to radiate love equally to all five, simultaneously the counterpart sign[89] appears and access concentration is attained. Continuing to meditate, attain the full concentration of the first dhyāna by developing and repeatedly practicing that same sign. In the first dhyāna the five hindrances have been suppressed and the five factors — investigation (applied thought), analysis (sustained thought), joy, bliss, and one-pointedness — are present. With the attainment of the first dhyāna, a practitioner also attains the liberation of mind with love (P. *mettā-cetovimutti*).[90] As meditation continues, the second and third dhyānas (in the fourfold schema) will be gained.

Compassion (*karuṇā*) is wishing beings to be free from suffering and its causes. Reflecting on the three kinds of duḥkha — the duḥkha of pain, change, and the pervasive duḥkha of conditioning[91] — wish yourself to be free of them. Then gradually increase the scope of your compassion to include dear ones, strangers, and people you don't like, and wish them to be free from all duḥkha whatsoever.

To develop empathic joy (*muditā*), begin with a dear person, followed by a neutral person, and then a hostile one. Contemplate the goodness they have in their lives and have a sense of abundance. Rejoice in their good fortune and rejoice in the merit that caused it. Wish them not to be parted from this well-being — not by their possessively clinging to it but by joyously appreciating it. Then recollect other beings who are currently experiencing good fortune and feel happy for them; rejoice that they have goodness in their lives and rejoice in their virtuous activities. Let go of any sense of jealousy or competition that wants to deprive them of the causes of well-being. Instead, have the sincere wish that everyone not be separated from abundance, well-being, and excellent opportunities. Here, too, include yourself, rejoicing at your good fortune and virtue.

Equanimity (*upekkhā*) is explained differently in various contexts. In the Pāli tradition, it refers to a sense of acceptance about what is and is not possible. To cultivate it, reflect on the difficult and painful things in your life that haven't yet been resolved. Consider that these circumstances came into being as a result of karma, your own actions. Karma is real and powerful; once karmic seeds have ripened we cannot unripen them. We must accept the situation, stop fighting the reality of what is happening, and cultivate fortitude and equanimity. This will make the mind strong and prevent becoming bitter about life. After cultivating equanimity for yourself, gradually extend it to others. When spreading equanimity to dear ones, strangers, people you don't like, and all beings, recall that beings fare according to their karma. Although you may want to help them, sometimes their situation is such that you are unable to help because of the strength of their karma or because they are not receptive at this moment. Abide in equanimity and don't suffer unnecessarily, thinking that you should be able to fix their problem. Keep your heart open to them, but realize that just as you can't always resolve all of your own dilemmas caused by your karma, neither can you resolve others' difficulties.

Breaking down the barriers between oneself and the neutral person, the dear one, and the hostile one are as above in the meditations on love, compassion, and joy. So too is cultivating and

repeatedly practicing the sign. Through this one enters the fourth dhyāna. A meditator can gain the fourth dhyāna only on the basis of having attained the third by means of meditation on one of the other immeasurables. In other words, only after attaining the first, second, and third dhyānas on love, compassion, and empathic joy can a meditator attain the fourth dhyāna on equanimity.

Serenity can be cultivated with any of the four brahmavihāras, beginning with love. You can abide in them with access concentration or absorption into one of the dhyānas. The "liberation of mind by love" refers to dhyāna absorption on love. The four brahmavihāras, when perfected to the state of dhyāna, are liberations of mind in that they are free from the five hindrances and gross negativities of body, speech, and mind. They are also free from confines because love, compassion, joy, and equanimity are radiated in all directions. The expansive karmic result of these liberations of mind overpowers the negative karmic influence of the limited karma of the desire realm. All four brahmavihāras are liberated from hostility and malice. Specifically, love has the remarkable ability to liberate the mind from malice, compassion liberates from vexation, joy liberates from discontent, and equanimity from attachment. These four liberations of mind weaken the fetters and lead meditators to becoming nonreturners. Once combined with the awakening factors, those concentrations lead to final liberation from saṃsāra.

REFLECTION

1. Reflect on the various types of happiness — physical, mental, spiritual — and their external and internal causes, and generate love, the wish that all beings have these.
2. Releasing all thoughts of unworthiness, respectfully wish yourself to have happiness and its causes. Imagine your healthy needs being fulfilled.
3. Spread this love to those you respect.
4. When this is stable, gradually spread love to friends, strangers, and people you don't get along with.
5. Then extend love to all beings in all realms of existence. Focusing on that experience of love, develop concentration.

By cultivating the five absorption factors (*dhyānāṅga*), a meditator successfully suppresses the five hindrances and attains the first dhyāna. These five absorption factors were discussed in the Sanskrit tradition as well.

1. Investigation directs and applies the mind to the meditation object. Uplifting the mind and placing it on the object, it brings the mind onto the object.

2. Analysis sustains awareness on the meditation object until the mind gradually becomes peaceful. For example, if the meditation object is the breath, analysis sustains attention on the breath, examining and knowing each breath very clearly.

Investigation is compared to ringing a bell, and analysis is like the resonance of the sound. Other analogies are: investigation is like a bird flapping its wings, and analysis resembles it floating; investigation is like holding a dish, and analysis is like drying it.

3. Joy is delight and a sense of satisfaction that arises by being interested in the object. It arises when the mind settles down and becomes peaceful as a result of investigation and analysis. For example, by recollecting the Buddha with deep concentration, we feel deep inspiration and elation. Joy brings lightness of body and mind. Sometimes it may even feel like the body is floating in air. Joy is the result of having developed some degree of concentration.

4. Bliss is the pleasant and happy feeling that accompanies concentration as a result of the peacefulness and stillness of the mind. This bliss is unlike what we usually call bliss in a worldly sense because now the mind is tranquil and satisfied. Joy is likened to the delight a thirsty traveler has upon seeing an oasis, and bliss is likened to the happiness and pleasure he experiences by drinking the water and resting under a tree.

5. One-pointedness unifies the mind and its accompanying mental factors on the object. It is a stillness of the mind that allows the mind to stay in a relaxed manner on the meditation object.

As we approach dhyāna, the five factors sequentially increase in strength. When all five are present and work together to plunge the mind into the meditation object so that the mind becomes

completely absorbed in the object, the first dhyāna is attained. Investigation and analysis are the basic application of mind that leads to samādhi. While they investigate and examine the object, respectively, they do not judge or form opinions about it. Instead investigation and analysis come to know the object well and maintain interest in it. Investigation is initially more prominent because it applies the mind to the object repeatedly. Once the object is fixed in the mind, analysis continues the awareness and examination of the object. For example, investigation applies the mind to the meditation object, which at this stage is the counterpart sign, and analysis sustains that awareness and examines and knows the counterpart sign. These are the two basic and most important functions that develop samādhi.

Joy and bliss arise when investigation and analysis harmonize and work together and become more refined. As concentration increases, joy arises. Having elements of exuberance and elation, joy is relatively coarse compared with bliss, which is the feeling of pleasure that accompanies concentration. Although joy is exhilarating, bliss is more relaxed and satisfying.

These five factors have to be cultivated with patience. We cannot will access concentration or any other meditative state to arise. Making meditation into a struggle is not the way to attain blissful samādhi. Pushing makes the mind tight and agitated, producing the opposite of what we wish. It is more effective to soften the mind and allow concentration to deepen. If we cultivate the factors with consistent but relaxed effort, when they are mature and strong the mind will go into full absorption by itself.

While the five factors may sometimes be present in ordinary consciousnesses, they do not work together. When cultivating samādhi, they work together to reduce and finally suppress the hindrances, although each factor has more sway in counteracting one or another of the hindrances. Investigation opposes lethargy and sleepiness by putting the mind on the meditation object. Analysis counteracts doubt by keeping the mind steady on the object without the jumpiness of doubt. Joy counteracts malice, and bliss is the remedy to restlessness and regret because the mind naturally prefers what is delightful over what is agitating. One-

pointedness works against sensual desire by unifying the mind on the object in a worthwhile way.

The five dhyāna factors consolidate the mind on the meditation object. Investigation directs the mind to the object, analysis secures it there, joy generates interest in it, bliss experiences its affective quality, and one-pointedness focuses the mind on it.

A mind with full concentration is like a room with only one chair. When the chair is occupied, if another guest comes in, he leaves immediately because there is no place for him to sit. Similarly, when samādhi is focused one-pointedly on the meditation object, other thoughts cannot stay in the mind. As wonderful as concentration is, it only suppresses the hindrances; it does not eradicate them. Only the wisdom developed by unifying serenity and insight can do that. The mind endowed with mindfulness, introspective awareness, and samādhi gives rise to true wisdom that knows all conditioned phenomena as impermanent, duḥkha, and selfless and that leads to the path wisdom that knows nirvāṇa.

The Four Dhyānas

Once the five hindrances are suppressed by the five absorption factors, full meditative absorption is attained. There are eight levels of absorption — four of the form realm and four of the formless realm — that a meditator in the human realm can attain. In each successive state of absorption, concentration deepens. However, the formless absorptions are not useful for gaining realizations because the mind is too absorbed.

In the Pāli sūtras, the Buddha describes right concentration in terms of the four dhyānas that are form-realm spheres of consciousness (SN 45.8).

> What is right concentration? Herein, secluded from sense pleasures, secluded from nonvirtuous states, a monastic enters and dwells in the first dhyāna, which is accompanied by investigation and analysis with joy and bliss born of seclusion.

> With the subsiding of investigation, he enters and dwells in the second dhyāna which has inner confidence and mental unification, is without investigation and analysis, and has joy and bliss born of concentration.
>
> With the fading out of joy, he dwells in equanimity, and with mindfulness and introspective awareness he experiences bliss with the body; he enters and dwells in the third jhāna of which the ariyas declare: "He is equanimous, mindful, one who dwells happily."
>
> With the abandoning of pleasure and pain and with the previous disappearance of joy and displeasure, he enters and dwells in the fourth dhyāna, which is neither painful nor pleasant and includes the purification of mindfulness by equanimity. This is called right concentration.

The dhyānas are distinguished by their component factors, as shown in the chart below. While the presentation in the sūtras and the Abhidharma analysis may differ superficially, they come to the same point.

The Four Dhyānas and Their Corresponding Dhyānic Factors

DHYĀNA	ABHIDHARMA ANALYSIS	SŪTRA EXPOSITION
First	Present: investigation, analysis, joy, bliss, one-pointedness of mind	Absent: sensual pleasures, nonvirtuous states of mind Present: investigation, analysis, joy, bliss born of seclusion (from the five hindrances)
Second	Present: joy, bliss, one-pointedness	Absent: investigation, analysis Present: internal stillness, one-pointedness of mind, joy, bliss born of concentration
Third	Present: bliss, one-pointedness	Absent: joy Present: equanimity, mindfulness, introspective awareness, bliss experienced by body
Fourth	Present: neither-pleasure-nor-pain, one-pointedness	Absent: bliss (of body) and pain, joy and displeasure Present: neither-pain-nor-pleasure, purity of mindfulness, equanimity; mind is purified, bright, unblemished, rid of imperfection, malleable, wieldy, steady, and attained to imperturbability.

First Dhyāna

The Buddha describes the experience of the first dhyāna (MN 39.15):

> Having abandoned these five hindrances, imperfections of the mind that weaken wisdom, quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from nonvirtuous states, he enters upon and abides in the first dhyāna, which is accompanied by investigation and analysis, with joy and bliss born of seclusion. He makes the joy and bliss born of seclusion drench, steep, fill, and pervade his body, so that there is no part of his whole body not pervaded by the joy and bliss born of seclusion.

When the five factors are fully developed and have suppressed the five hindrances, the mind naturally flows into the concentrated state of the first dhyāna. The mind is now totally withdrawn from sense objects, although there is some difference of opinion whether there is recognition of sound while in dhyāna. Some people say

there could be slight recognition of sound but it does not disturb the mind. Others say there is no perception of sound at all. The mind being secluded from nonvirtuous states means that it is separated from the five hindrances, and the joy and bliss the meditator experiences is a result of having abandoned the five hindrances.

Concentration in the dhyānas is sharp and focused, but also free from tension and stress. It is arrived at through balanced effort that is firm but not tight. Buddhaghosa gives an analogy of balanced effort (Vism 4.68). In ancient India a surgeon's students would practice using a scalpel on a lotus leaf. Someone who is hurried and tense applies too much force and either cuts the lotus leaf in two or pushes it under the water. Someone who is too lax and timid doesn't dare touch the scalpel to the lotus leaf for fear of dunking it or slicing it. However, someone with balanced effort is relaxed yet knows the right degree of pressure to cut the leaf properly.

Prior to attaining the first dhyāna, a meditator puts effort into increasing joy and bliss. When she enters the first dhyāna, joy and bliss are firm and she no longer makes a conscious effort to increase them. Without thought, the mind remains clearly focused on the meditation object, experiencing this great delight. The Buddha compares the experience of the first dhyāna to bath powder kneaded with water to form a ball, where the water permeates the entire ball but does not ooze out. Likewise, the meditator "makes the joy and pleasure born of seclusion drench, steep, fill, and pervade her entire body, so that there is no part of her body unpervaded by the joy and pleasure born of seclusion."

Some people mistakenly believe that pleasure is antithetical to Dharma practice and must be relinquished. Here we see meditators actively cultivate joy and bliss, so that in the first dhyāna joy and bliss pervade their entire body, which stops the mind's obsession with sensual pleasure. They stop creating destructive karma involving sense objects, enabling them to have a flexible state of mind that can be directed toward realizing reality.

Just as meditators must have stable access concentration before going on to develop the first dhyāna, so too should they master the

first dhyāna before going on to the second. There is a delicate balance here: On the one hand, there may be a tendency to become complacent enjoying the first dhyāna and not continue to practice. On the other hand, there may be an overeager tendency to push ahead and attain the second dhyāna quickly. Both of these tendencies are detours to avoid; taking the time to master the first dhyāna prevents them. Mastery of a dhyāna involves perfecting the skill in this dhyāna so that the meditator is able to enter, abide, and emerge from it without difficulty. She can stay in the dhyāna for as long as she wishes, and upon emerging, the mind is clear and she is not confused about where she is or what is happening around her. She is able to review the experience, noting the process by which she entered, abided, and emerged from that dhyāna. She is also able to analyze the dhyāna into its different factors, clearly knowing each absorption factor that is present.

The *Connected Discourses on Dhyāna* (SN 34) discuss the meditative skills to master in one dhyāna before going on to the next:

1. Concentration: knowing what factors — such as investigation, joy, and so forth — that each dhyāna has.
2. Attainment: entering dhyāna easily.
3. Maintenance: steadying the mind in dhyāna.
4. Emergence: being able to emerge from the dhyāna at the time one has determined before entering meditation.
5. Pliancy: relaxing the mind and making it pliant.
6. Object: knowing and being comfortable with the kasiṇa object.
7. Range: knowing the range of concentration to be produced in the mind — as in knowing, "This concentration has a nimitta as the object, this one has the three characteristics as the object." In serenity concentration the nimitta is the object; in insight concentration mental and material phenomena characterized by one or another of the three characteristics are the object.

8. Resolution: resolving to elevate the mind to the next, higher dhyāna.
9. Thoroughness: acting with care in order to enter dhyāna.
10. Persistence: maintaining continuity in the practice.
11. Suitability: fulfilling the qualities that are pertinent and beneficial for concentration.

Second Dhyāna

While the meditator develops the eleven skills and becomes familiar with the first dhyāna, he continues to practice samādhi, receiving the four requisites with right livelihood, alternating walking and sitting meditations, and sleeping in moderation in the middle part of the night. At some point he begins to reflect on that experience. While absorbed in the first dhyāna, there is no thought or deliberation, so he leaves the first dhyāna and resumes normal consciousness, although that consciousness still bears the flavor of the first dhyāna's concentration. In that state, he evaluates the first dhyāna. Although the first dhyāna has been the most wonderful experience he has had and is definitely better than the pleasures of the desire realm, it also has some faults. It isn't far removed from the desire-realm mind with its five hindrances and manifest defilements. Furthermore, investigation and analysis are comparatively coarse factors. He recalls that the Buddha spoke of another meditative absorption that is even more excellent, in which investigation and analysis are not present. Having repeatedly reflected on the defects of the first dhyāna and the benefits of the second, he makes a determination to attain the second dhyāna.

After continuing to meditate and strengthen his faculty of concentration, when his faculties are strong enough, he enters access concentration and then goes directly into the second dhyāna without passing through the first dhyāna.[92]

To attain the first dhyāna, investigation and analysis were necessary to direct the mind to the meditation object and hold it there. Now other factors perform those functions, so those two factors are released, and there is an inner stillness and clarity of

mind that become more prominent. Joy and bliss are still present, and the one-pointed unification of mind is stronger, so the depth of concentration increases. Whereas previously joy and bliss arose due to being separated from the five hindrances, now they are present due to the power of samādhi itself.

The Buddha compared the joy and bliss experienced in the second dhyānas to a cool fount of water that wells up from below and permeates the entire lake. Similarly, the meditator "makes the joy and bliss born of concentration drench, steep, fill, and pervade this body, so that there is no part of his whole body not pervaded by the joy and bliss born of concentration." As before, he familiarizes and trains in the second dhyāna, developing the skills mentioned above.

Third Dhyāna

Although the meditator initially experiences the second dhyāna as much superior to the first, after some time he sees that even the peace of the second dhyāna is not free from faults. As concentration deepens, joy is seen as undesirable because it makes the mind too exhilarated. Aware that there is a deeper level of meditation, the meditator determines to attain it. He renews his practice with the meditation object, this time with the intention to abandon joy, and strengthens his faculty of concentration until it makes joy subside. When it does, the third dhyāna dawns. Bliss and one-pointedness are still present. The mindfulness, introspective awareness, and equanimity that were present before (but submerged due to the strength of the other factors) now become stronger and are prominent. There are various types of equanimity (Vism 4.157–66); in the third dhyāna, the equanimity of dhyāna, which leads to impartiality even toward bliss, is present. The Buddha compares the experience of the third dhyāna to lotuses that grow and thrive while immersed in water without rising out of it, such that the "cool water drenches, steeps, fills, and pervades them … so that there is no part of all those lotuses not pervaded by water … So too does the pleasure divested of joy drench, steep, fill and pervade this body, so that there is no part of his whole body unpervaded by the pleasure divested of joy."

In addition, the meditator "feels bliss with his body." This indicates that in dhyāna he experiences the bliss of his mental body and makes the bliss free from joy drench and pervade his entire mental body. After emerging from dhyāna, he experiences bliss in his physical body. Cultivating skill in the various aspects of the third dhyāna, he trains in it and develops some degree of mastery in it.

Fourth Dhyāna

After mastering the third dhyāna, the meditator sees that it too is faulty in that the feeling of bliss in it is comparatively coarse and can provoke subtle attachment. That is, the bliss of samādhi had counteracted attachment to sensual pleasures, but now it disturbs the tranquility of the mind by making subtle attachment arise. Even though the blissful feeling coexists with equanimity in the third dhyāna, bliss is not the strongest support possible for equanimity; it pulls the mind away from equanimity because there is some attachment to it. A neutral feeling — one that is neither painful nor pleasurable — is the best support for equanimity. Having considered the defects of the third dhyāna and knowing that there is a superior state of concentration, he makes a determination to attain the fourth dhyāna. He practices in order to release the bliss, and when his faculties are strong enough, the bliss fades away and he enters the fourth dhyāna. Pleasure and pain, joy and displeasure all vanish, and the meditator abides in the fourth dhyāna, which is free from painful and pleasurable feelings. Equanimity, which is far more peaceful than bliss, comes to the forefront. The firmness of equanimity fully purifies mindfulness, and his one-pointed unification of mind is strong.

Equanimity is present in all four dhyānas, although in the first two it is in the background, overshadowed by the other absorption factors. In the first dhyāna investigation and analysis bring fluctuation, and in the second dhyāna joy causes ripples in the stillness of the mind. In the third dhyāna, because joy has faded away, mindfulness, introspective awareness, and equanimity are prominent. However, equanimity is not fully evident because bliss provokes a subtle attachment to the blissful feeling. In the fourth

dhyāna, this subtle attachment and the blissful feeling are released and equanimity flourishes. Now the meditator "sits pervading this body with a pure bright mind, so that there is no part of his whole body not pervaded by the pure bright mind." This radiant mind abides in equanimity, undisturbed even by bliss. This is the feeling of equanimity that has neither-pain-nor-pleasure. It is completely free from physical feelings of pain and pleasure and mental feelings of joy and grief.

The dhyānas are higher levels of the mundane mind; they are more focused, flexible, and have greater ability to perceive more clearly than the confused and obscured mental states of the desire realm. The dhyānas are called "blissful abidings here and now" because the pleasant feeling of bliss accompanies the first three. The fourth dhyāna is a pleasant abiding because the peace of equanimity pervades it. People who have attained any of the dhyānas see sensual pleasure as pointless and boring. They would much rather partake in dhyāna meditation, where they can remain peaceful for days at a time and emerge refreshed and invigorated, unlike people in the human realm who go on vacation and return exhausted.

Some meditation masters encourage their disciples to use insight to analyze the mental state of that meditative absorption after they emerge from it. They examine every factor of that meditative absorption to determine if there is a self lurking in it. Analyzing states of samādhi in this way, practitioners understand that even these wonderful, blissful experiences are composed of various factors and arise due to causes and conditions. These sublime states are impermanent, impersonal, and not to be grasped at as a self. Such analysis prevents meditators from craving and longing for these meditative experiences for their own sake and encourages them to use these meditative attainments as tools to attain liberation. Analyzing these states also prevents practitioners from generating the erroneous view that these states are a self or the experience of God or another absolute deity. Furthermore, such analysis prevents conceit, thinking oneself is a great practitioner for having such meditative experiences. Instead, practitioners see once again that everything lacks self.

The Four Formless Absorptions

Beyond the four dhyānas are deeper states of concentration, the four formless states. Advancing from one dhyāna to the next involves refining the mind by successively abandoning coarse mental factors, whereas progressing through the four formless states entails refining the object of meditation. Taking their names from their meditation objects, the four formless states are the base of (1) infinite space, (2) infinite consciousness, (3) nothingness, and (4) neither-discrimination-nor-nondiscrimination.

Although the dhyānas are called "blissful abidings here and now," the four formless absorptions are referred to as "peaceful abidings" because the mental peace experienced in them deepens and remains undisturbed. As with the dhyānas, these peaceful abidings of the formless realm are cultivated serially, the lower ones being mastered before the higher ones are cultivated.

To review, many meditators training to gain the four dhyānas begin with a meditation object that is a form — the breath, a kasiṇa, and so forth. Through this, a conceptual appearance or learning sign appears, and that becomes the meditation object. With continued meditation, that mental image becomes more purified and beautiful, transforming into a bright light or a luminous sphere — the counterpart sign — and the mind becomes absorbed in that. This nimitta is the object for all four dhyānas.

If a meditator wants to go beyond the dhyānas into the formless absorptions, he focuses on the luminous sphere or radiant light of the kasiṇa object — blue, for example — which is the counterpart sign of his dhyānic meditation and expands it until it is as vast as space. He now becomes completely absorbed in this vast blueness with the mind of the fourth dhyāna. Blue is the only thing in his field of awareness; it is undivided and seamless, pervading the entire universe as far as the mind can reach. Then, to enter the absorption of infinite space, he considers that although the fourth dhyāna is peaceful, it is nevertheless faulty because its object is a form, and that a meditative absorption without form would be superior and more peaceful. He makes the determination to attain the absorption of infinite space, and resolving, "let this form

vanish," he mentally removes the blue pervading all of space. When the mind is properly prepared, the blue light disappears and all that remains as an object of awareness is the infinite space that was where the bright light had been. His mind now becomes immersed in this infinite expanse of space, with no perception of a nimitta at all. All perception of form or any other sense object has disappeared, and the meditator is only aware of the infinitude of space. Thus he enters and dwells in the absorption of infinite space, the first formless absorption.

The process of advancing from one meditative absorption to the next is similar to advancing from one dhyāna to the next. After mastering the present absorption, a meditator considers its defects and the benefits of the higher absorption. However elevated the present absorption is, it is still coarse and unpeaceful compared with the description of the next one. Seeking to be free from the defects of the previous state and to experience the deeper peace and mental refinement of the next, he generates the determination to attain the next absorption.

When the meditator has mastered the absorption of infinite space, he reflects that it is consciousness that is aware of infinite space. It is as if consciousness pervades that infinite space. He shifts his attention from infinite space to the infinity of the consciousness that is conscious of and pervades that space, and he makes a determination to attain the absorption of infinite consciousness. By means of making this determination and repeated practice, the perception of space falls away and only consciousness remains, extending infinitely. This is the second formless state.

After mastering the absorption of infinite consciousness, he reflects that there is no obstruction and impediment in it. He now focuses on the unimpeded nature of infinite consciousness until the awareness of consciousness falls away and there remains just the awareness of nothingness — its unimpeded and unobstructed nature. The object his mind focuses on is the nonoccurrence or nonexistence of the consciousness of the base of infinite space. That is, he is now aware that the consciousness of infinite space is no longer occurring. By focusing the mind on this, he enters the absorption of nothingness.

After becoming familiar with this deep concentration, he turns his attention to the consciousness that is aware of nothingness. Perceiving this very subtle consciousness to be even more peaceful, he enters and abides in the base of neither-discrimination-nor-nondiscrimination. This absorption is so refined that when in it, one cannot say discrimination is present, nor can one say there is no discrimination at all. Discrimination is still present but it is so subtle that it does not perform the normal function of discrimination. It is so subtle that if one tries to detect it, one cannot; but if one does not try to perceive it, one will be vaguely aware that there is subtle discrimination functioning. Thus the fourth formless absorption is called "neither-discrimination-nor-nondiscrimination," and neither-discrimination-nor-nondiscrimination is the object of that absorption. That state is also called the "peak of saṃsāra" because it is the most refined state of mind possible for beings caught in the cycle of rebirth.

Beings born in the formless realms due to having attained these meditative absorptions while they were human beings stay in these states of samādhi for eons. When the karma for that rebirth is exhausted, other karma ripens and they again fall to other realms in saṃsāra. The formless absorptions are so refined that it is difficult, though not impossible, for a human meditator to use them to cultivate the wisdom and insight leading to liberation. When the Buddha was still a bodhisattva, he trained with two meditation teachers after he left the palace. Under the first, he mastered the absorption of nothingness and under the second the absorption of neither-discrimination-nor-nondiscrimination. Realizing that despite having attained such refined samādhi his mind was not completely free from defilements, he left those teachers. Years later under the bodhi tree he perfected the wisdom and insight that culminated in full awakening.

Four Kinds of Development of Samādhi

The Buddha speaks of four types of concentration, according to the results they produce. Of course the results depend on the method

used as well as on a practitioner's motivation — the result they seek. The Buddha says (AN 4.41):

> There are, monastics, these four kinds of development of concentration. What four? (1) There is a development of concentration that leads to a pleasant abiding in this very life; (2) there is a development of concentration that leads to obtaining knowledge and vision; (3) there is a development of concentration that leads to mindfulness and introspective awareness; (4) there is a development of concentration that leads to the destruction of the pollutants.

The first development of concentration leads to happiness in this very life, what the Buddha calls "a pleasant dwelling in this very life." Here meditators train in the prescribed method, attain serenity, and then meditate progressively to attain the first, second, third, and fourth dhyānas. They abide blissfully in these states of concentration and create invariable karma that leads to rebirth in the corresponding form realm.

The second is the development of concentration that leads to attaining knowledge and vision, which refers to the superknowledge of the divine eye. Gaining this depends on mastery of the fourth dhyāna. The divine eye is useful for practitioners with compassion who seek to benefit others.

The third is the development of concentration that leads to mindfulness and introspective awareness. In this meditation, three of the five aggregates — feelings, discriminations, and miscellaneous factors (views and emotions) — are known as they arise, abide, and pass away. Through this concentration one develops a very focused mind that observes and understands the arising, abiding, and ceasing of these three mental events in one's own mind.

With the development of concentration that leads to the destruction of pollutants, a practitioner is aware of the momentary rising and passing away of each of the five aggregates as it occurs. Much more refined than the previous concentrations, this concentration is combined with insight. Some wisdom is present in

the concentration leading to mindfulness and introspective awareness, but it cannot see the momentary arising and passing away. It sees things as abiding for a while before ceasing. This fourth development of concentration knows subtle impermanence deeply. By seeing the momentary nature of all things — in particular the five psychophysical aggregates we cling to as self — a meditator gains profound realizations. She knows that everything that is impermanent is unsatisfactory in nature. Things that cease as soon as they arise are unstable and cannot provide lasting happiness. She also knows that whatever is impermanent is not a self; transient aggregates cannot endure long enough to be a real self.

Realization of the three characteristics — impermanence, duḥkha, and no-self — is considered mundane insight. It precedes the breakthrough to the wisdom knowing nirvāṇa that marks the attainment of the path of stream-entry. Through meditation with the wisdom knowing nirvāṇa, one will destroy the pollutants in stages and attain nirvāṇa as an arhat.

Samādhi and Insight

The ultimate purpose of samādhi is, in combination with insight wisdom, to eradicate defilements completely by propelling meditators gradually through the four stages of awakening — stream-enterer, once-returner, nonreturner, and arhat.

While on the path, meditation on the dhyānas refreshes the mind and can protect the meditator in dangerous situations. There are accounts of many forest meditators entering samādhi when a tiger is nearby. Later, upon arising from meditation unharmed, they saw tiger paw prints around the area.

We may be skeptical, thinking that since the dhyānas are so blissful, it is somehow wrong for practitioners to indulge in them. The Buddha had a similar doubt at the beginning. As one practicing extreme asceticism, he thought pleasant experiences were dangerous because they would entice the practitioner into desire. After doing ascetic practices for six years, he remembered going

into states of samādhi as a child and wondered if it was the path to awakening. As he reflected on this, he understood that there was no reason to be afraid of the pleasure of meditative absorption, because it did not involve nonvirtuous states of mind as sensual pleasures did. He began to meditate with dhyānas and recommended this type of meditation to his disciples as a way to overcome hindrances by drawing the mind away from sensual pleasure to a higher pleasure and then to awakening.

In recommending the dhyānas, the Buddha urged his disciples to use higher types of happiness to abandon attachment to lower types of happiness. The peace of the dhyānas so outshines the happiness derived from sensual pleasures that it automatically helps practitioners to see the futility and unsatisfactoriness of sensual happiness.

Of course if we were to indulge in the peace of the dhyānas, there is the danger of becoming attached to them. This attachment could dissuade us from making effort to eradicate defilements completely. For this reason, the Buddha taught how to abandon attachment to the dhyānas. Having meditated in a dhyāna, the practitioner arises and reflects on that mental state itself: the dhyāna is impermanent, is duḥkha in nature, and lacks a self; it is a saṃsāric state, and as such, not worth being attached to. He then meditates with insight to free himself from saṃsāra.

As shown by the Buddha's awakening, attaining the fourth dhyāna is necessary to become a buddha. It is the door to the three higher knowledges — knowledge of past lives, of the passing away and reappearance of beings, and of the destruction of pollutants — that preceded the Buddha's awakening. The Buddha described how he employed that concentrated mind to attain awakening (MN 36.38):

> When my concentrated mind was thus purified, bright, unblemished, rid of imperfection, malleable, wieldy, steady, and attained to imperturbability, I directed it to knowledge of the recollection of past lives ... to knowledge of the passing away and reappearance of beings ... to knowledge of the destruction of the pollutants. I directly knew as it

> actually is [the four truths] ... When I knew and saw thus, my mind was liberated from the pollutant of sensual desire, from the pollutant of existence, and from the pollutant of ignorance. When it was liberated there came the knowledge, "It is liberated." I directly knew, "Birth is destroyed, the holy life has been lived, what had to be done has been done, there is no more coming to any state of being."

Although it may be possible to go from access concentration to insight meditation, it is wiser to develop at least the first dhyāna. This is because in access concentration, the five hindrances are not well suppressed and may rebound, disturbing insight meditation. Doing insight meditation on the basis of the first dhyāna prevents this.

For other people cultivating insight first is more suitable. Practicing insight meditation weakens the five hindrances. After the hindrances have been worn down by insight, these practitioners cultivate serenity and attain the dhyānas.

For people who seek liberation from saṃsāra, the higher training in wisdom is essential, and this requires insight. Insight requires some degree of samādhi. While some stream-enterers and once-returners may not have attained a dhyāna, or if they have, have not mastered it, they do have the wisdom of insight into the three characteristics, which has some degree of concentration.

In general, the four establishments of mindfulness are used to develop insight. However, certain practices within the four establishments can be used as absorption practices — for example, the mindfulness of breathing and the mindfulness of the foul aspects of the body. Buddhaghosa said that the contemplation of feelings, mind, and phenomena do not lead to attainment of even the first dhyāna.[93]

The sūtras are not completely clear about the degree of samādhi needed to become an arhat, and it seems that there are a variety of ways to go about attaining liberation. Wisdom and insight are essential elements in all of them, but the degree of samādhi is variable.

While the dhyānas focus the mind on one object only, the Pāli commentarial literature speaks of another kind of concentration — momentary concentration (*khaṇika-samādhi*), which does not restrict the range of awareness to one object. To develop it, meditators do not exclude the multiplicity and diversity of phenomena from their field of attention. Instead, they direct mindfulness toward the changing states of mind and body, noting any phenomenon that appears. In other words, in meditation they maintain continuous awareness of whatever enters into their field of perception and release any clinging to it, simply noting the variety of sensory objects, feelings, mental states, and so forth that arise and cease in their field of awareness.

By doing this, concentration becomes continuously stronger until it becomes established one-pointedly on the constantly changing stream of events. Despite the change in the object — one moment it is a memory, the next a physical sensation, then a mental feeling, and so forth — the single-pointed unification of the mind remains. Whereas previously when cultivating concentration any change of object would disturb the concentration, now it does not. In fact, after a while the mind that is aware of the constantly changing phenomena in the field of awareness becomes strong enough to suppress the five hindrances, in the same way as access concentration does. These meditators progress on the path of insight, which in time will lead to the breakthrough to the wisdom knowing nirvāṇa. Practicing the four establishments of mindfulness is one way to develop this flexible yet steady concentration. According to some commentaries, these meditators can gain an arhatship by cultivating insight knowledge with access concentration, without attaining any of the dhyānas.[94]

Dry-insight meditators develop insight focused on the ever-changing stream of experience — the arising and ceasing of the five aggregates. Because their meditation is not focused on a single object, their minds do not enter dhyāna. However, when their mind shifts from the rising and ceasing of the aggregates and takes nirvāṇa as its object — as it does during the path and fruit of stream-enterer and so on — their concentration rises to the level of the first dhyāna for that experience. Thus their paths and fruits are

the supramundane first dhyāna,[95] because all paths and fruits must occur at the level of dhyāna.

In dhyāna the mind is focused single-pointedly and unwaveringly on an unchanging object — such as the mental image of the foulness of the body[96] — whereas the mind used to cultivate insight requires certain mental functions that are not operative within dhyāna, such as the ability to observe, analyze, and be mindful of a changing object of perception. Thus to do insight meditation, meditators emerge from a dhyāna. While their minds are still infused with the power of dhyāna, they do analysis. Although this concentrated state is not as deep as a dhyāna, it is sufficiently focused to analyze the object and generate insight without being distracted to other objects.

The dhyāna that accompanies the supramundane paths and fruits is a supramundane dhyāna, which is not the same as a mundane dhyāna. According to the *Path of Purification* and the Abhidhamma system, meditators in general practice insight in a state of concentration that is not a dhyāna. This is called insight concentration (P. *vipassanā-samādhi*). When meditators make the breakthrough to the supramundane path, the mind naturally jumps into a dhyānic state. If they have practiced dhyāna first, the path and fruit will occur at the level of the dhyāna that they used as the "basis dhyāna" for practicing insight (another opinion is that it occurs at the level of the dhyāna that was investigated with insight-knowledge; a third opinion is that it can occur at either level, depending on the wish of the meditator).[97]

Samādhi does not achieve its ultimate purpose without insight, and insight is gained through practicing the four establishments of mindfulness. So it is to the practice of the four establishments of mindfulness that we turn in chapters 12 and 13.

10 | The Practice of Serenity in Chinese Buddhism

THE QUIESCENCE of serenity and the analytical wisdom of insight are like the two wings of a bird or two wheels of a cart: they must be balanced for the aspired result to come about. This is true also for Chan meditation, which leads to both serenity and insight.[98] Serenity suppresses the afflictions, nurtures the mind, and can be used to create merit. Insight brings wisdom and cultivates Dharma understanding. As the Buddha says in the *Dharmapada* in the Chinese canon (Taishō 04.210.572a):

> In the absence of concentration, one does not exercise wisdom. In the absence of wisdom, one does not course in concentration. The path comes forth from concentration and wisdom.

Learning how to practice serenity and insight is essential before engaging in the actual practice, but merely knowing the words — even being able to teach this method to others — is not sufficient. Not practicing it ourselves is like a beggar who calculates others' wealth.

Meditation

Nāgārjuna's *Treatise on the Middle Way* does not give instructions on how to cultivate serenity, but assumes that practitioners have already attained it and are prepared to meditate on the correct view once they have discerned it. Much of this preparation depends on being well grounded in the method aspect of the path, including serenity, described in the Yogācāra scriptures by Asaṅga and others. On the other hand, just cultivating serenity without the wisdom realizing emptiness is common to non-Buddhists and does not bring liberation. Only when we gain the union of serenity and insight can we generate the unpolluted wisdom that realizes the

eight negations in Nāgārjuna's homage in the *Treatise on the Middle Way* and knows emptiness directly.

Before entering samādhi, it is essential to think of the duḥkha of all sentient beings to avoid becoming attached to the bliss of samādhi. In this way, we conjoin the mind of great compassion and bodhicitta with all our meditation practices and reflect on the emptiness of all the practices we do. This is practiced repeatedly over time in order to gain familiarity with it.

For many centuries we Tibetan practitioners have had the misconception that meditators following Chinese Buddhism engage in blank-minded meditation. During the time of Śāntarakṣita, Chinese monks resided at Samye Monastery in Central Tibet, where they translated texts from Chinese into Tibetan. If they had had this wrong view, Śāntarakṣita would have refuted it himself and would not have asked Kamalaśīla to come in later years to do so. This shows that Hvashang Mahāyāna's (C. Hoshang Mohoyen) corrupted view of Chan was not shared by all Chinese practitioners.

The great debate at Samye (c. 792–94) between Hvashang Mahāyāna (meaning "Mahāyāna abbot") and Kamalaśīla was a decisive point in Tibetan Buddhist history. As recounted by Tibetan historians, Hvashang Mahāyāna asserted that all thoughts are useless and to be abandoned on the path. Just as clouds, be they black or white, obscure the sky, so too thoughts, be they constructive or destructive, obscure the true nature. Thus the method side of the path was unnecessary because it involved thought. One simply has to empty the mind of all thought whatsoever and nirvāṇa will be attained. The Indian sage Kamalaśīla refuted blank-minded meditation by asserting that practices on the method side of the path are imperative for the collection of merit and that emptiness must first be approached by means of constructive thought before it can be nondualistically perceived. As a result of the debate Tibetans turned toward India, rather than China, as the principal source for Buddhist scriptures and ideas.

Interestingly, a similar debate was going on at approximately the same time in China as well, where the Huayan and Chan

patriarch Guifeng Zongmi (780–841) criticized the views and practices of certain Chan practitioners.

While meditation instructions in Chinese Buddhism are vast, most of the important points have been covered in the forgoing chapters about concentration and will not be repeated here. These include guidelines about choosing a meditation place, preparing for the session, meditation objects, methods to counteract the five hindrances and other faults, progressing through the nine stages of sustained attention, maintaining mindfulness and introspective awareness during break times, and so forth. Meditation masters also warn against "dead-tree" samādhi, where meditators become attached to the peace of samādhi and fail to generate wisdom.

Creating Balance at the Beginning and End of a Meditation Session

The writings of the Chinese master Zhiyi (538–97), who emphasized practicing serenity and insight together in a balanced fashion, are particularly important because they appeared early in the history of Chinese Buddhism when proper meditation instruction was not readily available to the general Buddhist practitioner who was not a scholar. His comprehensive and clear instructions were a great boon to practitioners of his time and for those up to the present day. A good deal of this chapter is based on his book, *The Essentials of Buddhist Meditation*.

Someone wishing to engage in meditation to attain serenity must first generate the great vows to liberate all sentient beings from saṃsāra and to follow the Buddha's way to do this. Such a motivation makes the mind strong, courageous, and resilient. Serenity is also cultivated within the recollection that all phenomena exist in dependence on the mind. As the *Sūtra on the Ten Grounds* says (EBM 77):

> Throughout the three realms, there is nothing else at all. It is all created solely from the mind.

By understanding that the mind is empty of inherently existing nature, we will understand that all phenomena are not objectively real. By ceasing ignorance, afflictions cease, karmic formations cease, and saṃsāric duḥkha ends.

The body, breath, and mind are interrelated and therefore are discussed together. The body is the coarsest, the breath a little less coarse, and the mind the least coarse. Adjusting and balancing the body makes the breath subtler, which in turn makes the mind subtle. Such a subtle, fine mind is conducive for cultivating serenity. The influence goes the other way as well: when the mind is subtle, the breathing pattern changes and becomes more refined, and in turn the body is more relaxed.

Having mindfulness and introspective awareness of our body, breath, and mind during the break times is crucial. If our physical actions are rough, impulsive, and reckless, our breath will be coarse, and because of this our thoughts will be scattered and unclear. When we later sit down to meditate, our body will be agitated and uncomfortable, making the mind correspondingly restless and unsettled. During the break time, we should therefore reflect on what is important to do and how to do it, and then go about it in a relaxed yet focused manner.

Begin a meditation session by settling the body into a comfortable and stable posture. If possible, sit in the vajra position with the left foot on the right thigh and the right foot on the left thigh. Loosen your belt and put your left hand on top of the right,[99] in your lap, against your body.

Now balance the breath by expelling the stale breath: gently exhale it through the mouth while imagining that any blockages in the flow of the body's internal energy are released. Then close the mouth and gently inhale fresh air through the nose. Do this a few times. Then sit with the mouth closed and breathe through the nose. Sitting very still while meditating is important.

Begin meditation by adjusting the breath and helping it to become subtle if it is windy, uneven, or ordinary. Windy breathing is when inhaling and exhaling produce a sound; this makes the mind scattered and unfocused. Uneven breathing may occur even

when breathing is noiseless; here the breath catches and does not flow smoothly. As a result, the mind becomes stuck and blocked. Ordinary breathing occurs when the breath is still coarse, even though there is no sound and it does not catch. Breathing this way makes the mind tired.

To subdue these three imbalanced ways of breathing, adjust the breath by focusing the mind at the navel; this has a stabilizing effect. Check that the body is relaxed and tension free. Also imagine the breath penetrating all the pores freely and without obstruction. In this way, the breath becomes subtler and more refined. The breathing process is slower, smoother, and more relaxed. Breathing in this way automatically makes the mind more stable, peaceful, and content. When the breath and mind are more subtle and refined, it is easier to enter meditative absorption. In addition, disorders such as stress and imbalances of the winds and qi do not occur.

Having balanced the breath when entering meditation, now balance the mind by first reining in distracted thoughts. Then look out for and make adjustments should lethargy, restlessness, agitation, or laxity occur. Lethargy occurs when the mind is muddled and unclear. At this time, firmly place the attention at the tip of the nose. Focusing on this one object without letting the mind sink into dullness is a remedy for lethargy. Restlessness occurs when the body and mind are fidgety, ill at ease, and unsettled. Anchoring the attention at the navel helps to stabilize restive energy and stop distractions. Agitation may arise when mindfulness is strong and the mind is more concentrated, yet the mind's focus has moved upward so that the chest area becomes painful. Should this happen, relax the mind and let the focus go downward toward the navel. This helps the qi to flow down and become more balanced, which eliminates the chest pain. Laxity manifests when we don't maintain suitable posture in meditation and a lack of mental lucidity and determination has set in. To remedy this, reestablish the recommended meditation posture and anchor the mind with strong mindfulness on the meditation object.

Having entered meditation as described above, maintain strong mindfulness and ensure the body, breath, and mind remain balanced by being aware of what is happening with each of them. Regarding the body, occasionally check to make sure that it remains in the proper position and is not slumped over or leaning to one side, and that our hands, mouth, and so forth are in the proper position. If anything is askew, correct your posture by straightening it. Similarly, check that the breath is gentle and smooth. If it has become windy, uneven, or ordinary, or if it is forced and not relaxed, apply the appropriate antidotes so that it becomes refined and gentle. If the mind has been infected by lethargy, restlessness, agitation, or laxity, apply the antidotes so that it becomes balanced. Keeping the body, breath, and mind in balance prevents disorders and obstacles from previous lives from arising and aids in concentration.

How you emerge from meditation is important. Since the body, breath, and mind have become subtler in meditation, they need to become coarser and more active before you engage in other activities. Immediately arising from the meditation seat and rushing around without allowing the body, breath, and mind to gradually adjust to the change in activity may bring on headaches or stiffness later. In addition, in future meditation sessions you may feel uncomfortable and fidgety. When coming out of meditation, first allow the mind to focus on an object different from the meditation object. Then open your mouth and gently exhale, imagining the wind dispersing from the energy channels in the body. Then uncross and move the feet a little. Follow this by rubbing your hands together to warm them and then rubbing the body briefly. Now put your hands over your eyes and open your eyes. Once any excessive physical heat has gone, get up and move about.

Cultivating skill in how we enter, abide, and arise from meditation plants the seeds to be like the great bodhisattvas described in the *Lotus Sūtra* (EBM 97):

> For the sake of the Buddha Path, the bodhisattvas in this great assembly have already diligently practiced effort for an incalculable number of tens of millions

> of crore[100] of eons. They have become skillful in entering, abiding in, and emerging from an incalculable number of trillions of crores of samādhis. They have gained great superknowledges, have long cultivated the pure, holy conduct, and have become well able to practice all of the good dharmas in appropriate sequence.

REFLECTION

1. Settle the body into a comfortable and stable posture.
2. Balance the breath by expelling the stale breath.
3. Adjust the breath if it is windy, uneven, or ordinary by focusing at the navel.
4. Place mindfulness on your meditation object if it is other than the breath.
5. Balance the mind by reining in distracted thoughts and then looking out for lethargy, restlessness, agitation, and laxity, and apply the appropriate antidotes should they occur.
6. At the conclusion of the session, dedicate the merit and arise from meditation gently.

Cultivating Serenity and Insight in Sitting Meditation

In the actual practice, serenity and insight are used as antidotes to the roughness and disorder of a beginner's mind, as a way to counter the faults of lethargy and agitation, as a means to deal with subtle states of mind in meditative absorption, and as the method to perfectly balance meditative absorption and wisdom.

Even if meditators avoid the trap of dead-tree samādhi — becoming attached to the bliss of samādhi and failing to generate wisdom — they may still not have the correct balance of concentration and wisdom. If they lack the wisdom based on insight, their meditative absorption will be characterized by ignorance. Even if their concentration is strong, they will be unable to cut the fetters that bind them to saṃsāra. The remedy is to

emphasize the cultivation of wisdom and then combine it with serenity.

Other people have sharp wisdom of the ultimate nature, but their concentration is weak and their meditation is hampered by distraction or laxity. Like a candle flame in the wind, their concentration cannot illuminate objects clearly and they are unable to cease the cycle of birth and death. These people must emphasize serenity and then unify it with insight so that their concentration becomes like a candle burning in a closed area that clearly illuminates all that is there.

Many people combine the Amitābha practice with Chan meditation. They concentrate their minds on the recitation of the Amitābha Buddha's name. When their concentration is firm, they "turn back the light" and observe the mind that is meditating, asking, "Who is reciting the Buddha's name?" This *hua-tou* — a short phrase or question used as a subject of meditation to focus the mind — becomes all-consuming in the sense that the mind is completely drawn into this investigation. As the intellect is confounded by this question, great doubt arises until suddenly there is a breakthrough and emptiness is realized. When done on the basis of firm serenity, the meditation on this hua-tou is insight meditation. It must then be conjoined with serenity. It is like picking up a pearl at the bottom of a pond: finding it when there are waves or ripples is difficult. The water must be still and clear, and then the mind-pearl appears by itself.

Cultivating Serenity and Insight while Interacting with the Environment

Zhiyi eloquently explains how to practice serenity and insight while engaged in various activities. Regarding walking, he says (EBM 117–19):

> At times when you are involved in walking, bring forth this thought, "For what purpose do I now wish to walk?" If it is on account of being directed by afflictions or by nonvirtuous or neutral matters, you

> should not proceed with walking. If it is not an instance of being directed by afflictions and if it is for the sake of a matter that produces virtuous benefits and that is in accord with the Dharma, you should go ahead and proceed with walking.
>
> How do you go about cultivating serenity while walking? If you are walking, maintain awareness that, due to walking, there may come to exist all of the phenomena of the afflictions, of good, of bad, and so forth. If you are completely aware that the mind engaged in walking as well as all phenomena present in walking cannot be found, the false-thinking mind will cease. It is this that constitutes the cultivation of serenity [while walking].
>
> How do you go about cultivating [insight] contemplation while walking? Bring forth this thought, "It is due to the mind that I move the body. As a result I bring about that forward movement referred to as walking. It is due to walking that there may then come to exist all of the phenomena of the afflictions, of good, of bad, and so forth."
>
> Then immediately turn back the attention and contemplate the mind that is engaged in walking. You will fail to perceive any characteristic appearance associated with it. Realize that the one who walks as well as all the phenomena involved in walking are both ultimately empty and still. It is this which constitutes the cultivation of [insight] contemplation [while walking].

The instructions for practice are clear: first examine your motivation for walking, and if it is conjoined with afflictions or even a neutral intention, do not proceed but stop and assess once again what is best to do at that moment.

To cultivate serenity while walking, maintain your introspective awareness so that afflictions do not arise. Furthermore, reflect on the mind engaged in walking as well as

everything else involved in walking — our legs, feet, and shoes; the road, its bumps and turns; our destination, others on the road, and so forth — and see that none of them can be found in their parts. Seeing this, the mind that mistakenly grasps them as real will cease.

To practice insight while walking, analyze what the word "walking" refers to. See that there is no independent action of walking; there is no independent I or mind that instructs the body to move. Walking exists by being merely designated in dependence on the legs moving the body forward. What is the mind that has the intention to walk? Does it have color, shape, or location? Does it exist in the past, present, or future? Is it unitary or does it have different aspects? Is it caused or uncaused? By employing ultimate analysis, understand that all phenomena involved in walking are empty of existing from their own side. Because their ultimate nature is beyond the afflictive conditioning of the world, they are said to be still.

Zhiyi continues by describing serenity and insight in relation to standing, sitting, lying down, doing various physical activities, and speaking in a similar way. He discusses how to practice serenity and insight when the six sense faculties are cognizing the six sense objects. As for the ear and sounds, he says (EBM 129–31):

> [Regarding] the cultivation of serenity when the ear hears sounds: Whichever sounds are heard by the ear, immediately realize that they are characterized by being like echoes. If you hear sounds with which you are temperamentally agreeable, do not give rise to attachment. As for sounds to which you are temperamentally opposed, do not give rise to hate. As for sounds to which you are neither opposed nor agreeable, do not give rise to a discriminating mind. It is this which constitutes the cultivation of serenity [while hearing].
>
> What is meant by the cultivation of [insight] contemplation in the hearing of sounds? Bring forth this thought, "No matter what sound is heard, it is empty and utterly devoid of any [inherent] existence. It is only from the coming together of the sense

> faculty and the sense object that there is the generation of the auditory consciousness. Next, the mental consciousness arises and, in a forced manner, gives rise to discriminations. It is because of this that there may then come to exist all of the phenomena of the afflictions, of good, of bad, and so forth."
>
> [Then] turn back the attention and contemplate the mind that hears sounds. You will not perceive any characteristic appearance. Realize that the one who hears as well as all of the other associated phenomena are ultimately empty and still. It is this which constitutes [insight] contemplation [in relation to the ear and sounds].

To practice serenity while hearing various sounds throughout the day, understand that all the sounds are false, like echoes. Just as an echo falsely appears to be the voice of a person, but is not, so too do all sounds falsely appear to have an independent essence, although they do not. Because these sounds do not exist in the way they appear, do not let attachment arise for ones that appear pleasant or anger arise for ones that appear unpleasant. There is no use in forming opinions and ideas about neutral sounds, as they, too, are false.

To cultivate insight regarding hearing, regard all sounds as empty of inherent existence. Why? Because all sounds, as well as the act of hearing and the one who hears, arise dependently, not by their own power. The auditory consciousness depends on the ear faculty encountering the sound, and sound itself is nothing more than vibratory waves in the air. The mental consciousness that reacts to the sounds arises dependent on the auditory consciousness, and then the afflictions of attachment, anger, and confusion arise in reaction to the pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral feelings experienced while hearing.

Then examine the mind that hears. What is it? Does it exist independent of the ear faculty and sound waves in the air? It, too, does not exist from its own side, nor does the person who is hearing, nor all the other phenomena associated with hearing a sound.

The analogies and descriptions Zhiyi uses for each sense object differ but come to the same point. Visual forms are like the moon reflected in water. Odors are false, deceptive, and unreal. Flavors are like tastes in a dream, and tactile sensations resemble reflections, illusions, and conjurations. He also encourages us to analyze the mind cognizing mental phenomena in sitting meditation.

A person who is able to cultivate serenity and insight of all these objects and in all situations is a true bodhisattva. Nāgārjuna says (NSP 301–3):

> When sitting undisturbed within the forest,
>
> in a state of stillness, one extinguishes the manifold ills.
>
> Calmly and contentedly, one gains unity of mind.
>
> This bliss is unequaled even by the bliss of the celestial realm.
>
> People seek after worldly profit,
>
> fame, clothing, and fine furnishings.
>
> This sort of pleasure affords no peace or security.
>
> One thus pursues his own benefit, but finds no satisfaction.
>
> The one with patched robes practices reliance on alms,
>
> and, whether moving or still, his mind is always unified.
>
> Spontaneously employing the eye of wisdom,
>
> he contemplates and knows the reality of all phenomena.
>
> Among all the different entryways into the Dharma,
>
> all are entered through equanimous contemplation.
>
> When the understanding and wise mind abides in stillness,
>
> nothing anywhere in the three realms is able to equal this.

REFLECTION

1. List the sequence of points to practice serenity when walking. Then walk slowly while practicing these.
2. After ten minutes, pause and notice the effect this has had on your mind.
3. List the sequence of points to practice insight when hearing. Sitting in meditation, observe the sounds you hear and practice these points.
4. Remember these points and practice them when you hear pleasant or unpleasant sounds in your daily life.

Deviant Meditation and Correct Meditation

Sometimes when practicing meditative absorption strange sensations or perceptions may occur. For example, the body moves about restlessly; it feels heavy as if there were a weight on it or it feels very light as if it were going to fly. The body may feel extremely hot or cold, tied up, or twisted, as if it were hanging or suspended from something. The body may experience tactile sensations that spark nonvirtue in the mind. Sometimes meditators experience strange mental states. The mind becomes heavy, clouded, and filled with unethical ideas; it may be distracted, confused, distraught, or filled with inappropriate happiness or sorrow. The mind may be moody: overwhelmed with sad thoughts or so happy that one appears drunk. These are all signs of deviant meditative absorptions.[101] If someone becomes attached to these sensations and appearances, grasping them to be true and real, he may become mentally ill and may open himself up to harm from spirits. Sometimes spirit interferences make the meditator seem especially intelligent, powerful, or charismatic, and as a result he becomes arrogant and clings to wrong views. Worldly people may think he is highly realized and blindly follow his guidance, so that he misleads other people on the path or draws them into harmful activities. Due to the heavy karma this person creates, when he dies, he will fall to an unfortunate rebirth.

If a practitioner of concentration has such symptoms or appearances, he should immediately recognize that they are false and deceptive and not believe them. Turning his mind to virtuous

objects, he should not become enchanted by or attached to such inverted signs and focus instead on the Buddha's teachings. He should consult his spiritual mentor, follow proper meditation instructions, and renew his refuge in the Three Jewels.

In contrast, meditators who attain the various dhyānas and are free from these abnormal signs are progressing well. They have a sensation of emptiness or lack of obstructions, brightness, and purity. Their minds are calm and tranquil and their thoughts accord with the Dharma. Their confidence in the Three Jewels deepens and their bodies and minds are responsive so that they can engage in virtue with ease. They are not interested in worldly concerns and do not feel obliged to get involved in them. Satisfied, content, and tranquil, they can enter into and emerge from dhyāna according to their wish.

Those who are progressing well should continue in their practice, applying serenity and insight at the appropriate times in their meditation. If they have deep meditative experiences, they should consult a realized master and explain their insight or experience. The master will either agree it was an authentic realization or give wise guidance to steer the meditators in the right direction. In this way, they will continue to advance in accord with the Buddha's teachings, which will bring good results to themselves and others.

Counteracting the Work of Māra

Buddhist scriptures speak of the four *māras*, or corrupting forces: (1) the afflictions, (2) five aggregates, twelve sense sources, eighteen constituents, (3) death, and (4) ghost and spirit demons. The first three are remedied by practicing the path and attaining liberation. The last māra generally refers to other beings who create interferences. In the sūtras Māra is depicted as a being who tries to create problems for sincere cultivators so that they deviate from the Dharma path. While some people regard Māra and his forces as a metaphor, others see them as actual external beings.

Mental states of desire, worry, craving, sleepiness, laziness, fear, doubt, remorse, arrogance, resentment, and so on are the work of Māra's armies. Some demons may enter the person's mind, causing violent mood swings and erratic behavior that could expose him to calamity. Demons may also inspire the kind of deviant concentration discussed above, where practitioners have all sorts of strange physical and mental experiences and may even appear to have spiritual powers and great charisma, such that they lead some people astray.

One method to dispel these demons involves the practice of serenity. Here a practitioner is to recognize these objects and people as false and not let them disturb the mind. She should neither fearfully push them away or desirously grasp at them, but rather return to her meditation and strengthen her concentration. When her concentration is strong, these interferences automatically disappear.

This method is reminiscent of the great Tibetan meditator Milarepa (1052–1135), who, when disturbed by spirits, asked them where they came from and why they wanted to bother him. The spirits replied, "Why did your mind, filled with preconceptions and superstitions, call us here?" In other words, the source of our suffering and fear is our own unsubdued, afflictive mind.

A second method employs insight. Here the meditator turns the light back on his own mind, asking, "What is the mind that is observing these things?" Since a self-enclosed, independent mind cannot be found, what can be disturbed by these interferences? The wisdom realizing emptiness is the ultimate protection. To paraphrase Nāgārjuna's statement in the *Commentary on Wisdom*, "Aside from the true character of phenomena (*dharmatā*), everything else is demonic phenomena." That is, since whatever is associated with ignorance and saṃsāra is not to be trusted, we should not get caught up in it, but put energy into attaining awakening. While sitting under the bodhi tree, the Buddha said to Māra (EBM 417):

> Numerous armies such as these

may vanquish the monastic.

I use the power of dhyāna and wisdom

to smash all these armies of yours,

and after perfecting the path to buddhahood,

I will bring all beings across to liberation.

If a practitioner is not yet strong enough to dispel these interferences through serenity or insight, she holds her mind steady, not letting false thoughts and disturbing emotions proliferate. She contemplates that the emptiness of the demon realm and the emptiness of the buddha realm are a single emptiness. There is nothing in the demon realm to fear and nothing in the buddha realm to cling to. In this way, her mind transforms into wisdom and the demons vanish.

Even if the frightful or attractive appearances do not vanish, Zhiyi counsels practitioners not to worry. There has never been a case in which a tiger that was a transformation of a demon has actually eaten anyone. Nor has an attractive man or woman who was a transformation of a demon ever become someone's spouse.

Furthermore, the disturbance comes principally from the side of the practitioner's mind because he allows fear, anger, and desire to arise and grow. The antidote is to increase wisdom and, by doing so, become more immune to such interferences. Practitioners can also recite mantras while maintaining mindfulness on the Three Jewels or the Buddha. Purification practices, recitation of precepts, and cultivation of a sense of integrity and consideration for others will also protect them from involvement in harmful actions. Negativity is unable to stand up to or conquer strong virtue, so if we keep our minds aligned with the Buddha's teachings, demons will vanish by themselves.

The Buddhist sage Tsung-pen (1020–99) advises that while meditating sometimes beautiful scenes or figures may appear to the mind, and at other times terrifying ones may appear. We should avoid being joyful at the former and despondent or antagonistic toward the latter.[102]

> You must realize that such scenes do not come from outside: all are born from being sunk in oblivion or are brought about by karmic consciousness. All that the eyes see and the ears hear is false — don't get attached to it! Keep on making energetic progress.

Wise advice, indeed!

11 | Higher Training in Wisdom: The Role of Mindfulness and Introspective Awareness

Introduction to the Thirty-Seven Harmonies with Awakening

HAVING DISCUSSED the higher training in concentration and the cultivation of serenity, we will now turn to the higher training in wisdom and the cultivation of insight. This involves the thirty-seven harmonies with awakening, practices shared in the Pāli and the Sanskrit traditions. The thirty-seven harmonies contain elements of all three higher trainings, and they all directly or indirectly cultivate the wisdom that realizes the four truths and the ultimate nature of reality. This is the wisdom that eliminates ignorance and leads to nirvāṇa.

From the perspective of the Sanskrit tradition, the Fundamental Vehicle teachings as explained in the Pāli, Chinese, and Tibetan canons are the foundation of the entire path. Here is where the four truths, three higher trainings, and thirty-seven harmonies with awakening are first taught. On this basis, the Mahāyāna explains the third truth — true cessation and emptiness — in more detail in the Perfection of Wisdom sūtras. The Mahāyāna also delves deeper into the meaning of the cognizing subject and the true path in the tathāgatagarbha teachings. On this basis, the Tantrayāna teachings follow. Here we see that the Fundamental Vehicle emphasized in the Pāli tradition and the Theravāda, the Mahāyāna teachings of the Perfection Vehicle, and the Tantrayāna teachings are not separate and unrelated paths, but the latter build on the former.

Unfortunately, some practitioners of Tibetan Buddhism do not pay adequate attention to these valuable practices of the thirty-

seven harmonies with awakening. While the thirty-seven harmonies are explained in Mahāyāna sūtras and commentaries, they are not widely practiced among followers of the Tibetan tradition. Perhaps this is because in the Indo-Tibetan tradition, these thirty-seven practices are correlated with the levels of the five paths, as explained below, so practitioners think that they are to be done later, after they have attained a path. However, I read a sūtra that explains how to include them in our daily practice, even at the beginner's level. I would like to encourage Tibetan Buddhists to do these thirty-seven practices, especially the four establishments of mindfulness. We meditate on them with a bodhicitta motivation and the Prāsaṅgika view of emptiness.

Studying the thirty-seven harmonies gives me the wonderful opportunity to relate to the Buddha as a bhikṣu who lived in India. This is different from seeing him as Vajradhara in a maṇḍala, as we do in Vajrayāna. For me it is very moving to read the sūtra accounts of the Buddha interacting with his disciples. I get a real sense of his life as a human being who lived on our Earth and taught people like me. I feel very close to the Buddha, our marvelous teacher.

Most of the sūtras were given in response to questions his disciples asked him, or they are follow-ups to questions he asked them or other renunciates. Someone would ask the Buddha, "How do we develop this realization or quality?" Other times, a problem would arise concerning a disciple's behavior, and one of the monks would ask the Buddha how to deal with it. It was in this very human way of interacting with the people around him that the Buddha gave instructions on the thirty-seven harmonies with awakening.

Before speaking in depth about the thirty-seven harmonies, there are two mental factors — mindfulness and introspective awareness — that are worthy of more attention because they play an important role in all three higher trainings.

The Importance of Mindfulness and Introspective Awareness

Discussed in both Pāli and Sanskrit traditions, the mental factors of mindfulness and introspective awareness primarily function to focus on what is important in the moment — be it our meditation object, the movement of our body, the reason for engaging in a certain action, and so forth. They work together to keep our mind in virtue and to redirect our attention back to what is important should it stray toward nonvirtue. They protect our minds from nonvirtue, thus preventing suffering and obstacles on the path. Śāntideva pleads (BCA 5:23):

> To those who wish to guard their minds,
>
> I make this appeal with palms joined:
>
> You must use every effort to employ
>
> both mindfulness and introspective awareness.

Mindfulness and introspective awareness also enable us to work for the benefit of others, as Togme Zangpo encourages in the "Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas" (36):

> In brief, whatever you are doing,
>
> ask yourself, "What's the state of my mind?"
>
> With constant mindfulness and introspective awareness
>
> accomplish others' good — this is the practice of bodhisattvas.

Mindfulness and introspective awareness will be explained separately and then we'll see how they operate together.

Mindfulness

The original meaning of "mindfulness" in Indian languages is memory or recollection. The Buddha used this ordinary word but gave it a new meaning specific to his doctrine. According to the two *Knowledges*,[103] mindfulness is a distinct mental factor that repeatedly brings to mind a phenomenon of previous acquaintance without forgetting it. In *Compendium of Knowledge* Asaṅga says (LC 3:49):

> What is mindfulness? In regard to a familiar object, the mind is not forgetful and operates without distraction.

Mindfulness has three features: (1) Its *focal object* is a familiar object. It cannot be generated toward an unfamiliar object. (2) The *subject*, the mind, is not forgetful of the object, meaning that it is focused on that object and not distracted from it. (3) Its *function* is to prevent distraction to other objects. After attention has been placed on the meditation object, mindfulness keeps it there.

When discussing mindfulness as one of the five faculties, the Buddha said (SN 48.10):

> And what, monastics, is the faculty of mindfulness? Here, monastics, the ariya disciple is mindful, possessing supreme mindfulness and discretion, one who remembers and recollects what was done and said long ago. He dwells contemplating the body in the body … feelings in feelings … mind in mind … phenomena in phenomena, ardent, introspectively aware, mindful, having removed longing and displeasure for the world. This is called the faculty of mindfulness.

Contemplating the body in the body means *contemplating the body as a body*. This indicates the specific object of contemplation: it is the mere body, not the painful, pleasureable, and neutral feelings it generates in us, not our ideas about our body, our like or dislike of the body, but simply what is there, a momentary body that is in the nature of duḥkha and that neither has a self nor is a self. The same pertains to feelings, mind, and phenomena. In short, mindfulness focuses on its object in a way that both remembers it and observes its characteristics just as they are. Conjoined with introspective awareness and wisdom, it brings insight into the nature of the object.

Mindfulness also means memory, calling to mind, and recollection. It recollects the precepts so that we can live within their boundaries. It prevents the mind from becoming engrossed in sense objects, daydreams, and anxious thoughts. It counteracts

absentmindedness and protects us from nonconscientiousness, being so focused on the plethora of inner preconceptions that we do not pay attention to what is at hand.

Mindfulness increases our store of knowledge by focusing our mind when we are listening to teachings and enabling us to remember them later. This twofold function of mindfulness — taking in what is happening in the present and recalling it afterward — facilitates learning, contemplation, and meditation on the Buddha's teachings as well as applying the teachings in all facets of our life.

Mindfulness reminds us of the goals of spiritual practice: attaining fortunate rebirths, liberation, and full awakening. In the practice of ethical conduct, it remembers our precepts, preventing nonvirtuous actions. In the cultivation of concentration, it remembers the meditation object, preventing distraction and restlessness. In the context of developing wisdom, it enables the mind to stay on the object and, together with wisdom, examines the person and the aggregates. In daily life, mindfulness remembers what has been done and what needs to be done. It distinguishes what is worthy of our attention and what is not. The Buddha compared mindfulness to a gatekeeper that safeguards what is important (AN 7.67):

> Just as the royal frontier fortress has a gatekeeper — wise, experienced, intelligent — to keep out those he doesn't know and to let in those he does, for the protection of those within and to ward off those without; in the same way an ariya disciple is mindful, highly meticulous, remembering and able to call to mind even things that were done and said long ago. With mindfulness as his gatekeeper, the ariya disciple abandons what is unskillful, develops what is skillful, abandons what is blameworthy, develops what is blameless, and looks after himself with purity.

In the Pāli tradition, a beginner will be given a basic object of meditation — usually the breath. Mindfulness of breathing settles and clears the mind during meditation sessions. In daily life, practitioners keep mindfulness on their breath as much as possible,

and if afflictions or distractions enter the mind, they renew mindfulness on the breath. If they need to turn their attention to another activity, they temporarily relax mindfulness of the breath and devote attention to the new task. Once that is finished, rather than glance around the room to see what interesting sights there are, they renew mindfulness on the breath.

In the Sanskrit tradition, mindfulness is maintained when contemplating a particular Dharma topic — for example, death, the kindness of others, emptiness — during meditation sessions. In the break times, we keep that topic in mind, reflecting on it as we go through the day. This is very effective for increasing wisdom and keeping the mind in virtue. The object of mindfulness for tantric practitioners, both in and out of formal sessions, is oneself as the meditation deity.

The purpose of restraining the senses is to restrain the mind. When our senses are unguarded, our minds become involved with sensory objects, which leads to experiencing pleasurable, painful, and neutral feelings. These feelings easily bring a flood of afflictive emotions in our minds. By being careful of the quality and quantity of objects we allow our senses to perceive, we can free the mind from emotional reactions to the various pleasant, painful, and neutral feelings that arise. This doesn't mean ignoring everyone and everything around us or moving through the environment like a robot. Rather, maintaining mindfulness on a specific virtuous or neutral object protects the mind from getting lost in the proliferation of thoughts, opinions, preferences, and emotions that center on external objects.

Mindfulness differs from bare attention. Bare attention is aware of and notes all the various objects, sensations, feelings, ideas, and emotions that arise in the mind. Mindfulness is related to wisdom; it chooses a virtuous or neutral object and focuses on it, becoming familiar with it and preventing mental wandering. In daily life, mindfulness focuses on our ethical values and precepts, thus ensuring that we act in accordance with them. Mindfulness must be wise and judicious; wisdom cannot arise in a mind that lacks mindfulness. The monk Māluṅkyaputta shares what the Buddha taught him about mindfulness (SN 35.95):

> Having seen a form with mindfulness muddled,
> attending to the pleasing sign,
> one experiences it with infatuated mind
> and remains tightly holding to it.
> Many feelings flourish within,
> originating from the visible form,
> covetousness and annoyance as well,
> by which one's mind becomes disturbed.
> For one who accumulates dukkha thus
> nibbāna is said to be far away …
> When, firmly mindful, one sees a form,
> one is not inflamed with lust for forms;
> one experiences it with dispassionate mind
> and does not remain holding it tightly.
> One fares mindfully in such a way
> that even as one sees the form
> and while one undergoes a feeling,
> [dukkha] is exhausted, not built up.
> For one dismantling dukkha thus,
> nibbāna is said to be close by.

What is said applies equally to sounds, odors, tastes, and tangible objects. With all of them, mindfulness imbued with wisdom exhausts duḥkha by ceasing its causes so that the practitioner approaches nirvāṇa.

The Buddha stressed the importance of mindfulness on the path. Of the thirty-seven harmonies with awakening, mindfulness constitutes eight: the four establishments of mindfulness, the faculty of mindfulness, the power of mindfulness, the awakening factor of mindfulness, and correct mindfulness as one of the eightfold path. Although the characteristics of mindfulness in these

contexts is the same, its strength and ability to eliminate afflictions differs, as can be seen when the harmonies with awakening are correlated with stages of the path.

REFLECTION

1. What is the role of mindfulness in cultivating ethical conduct?
2. What is the role of mindfulness when cultivating serenity?
3. How does mindfulness differ from bare attention?

Introspective Awareness

In the Sanskrit tradition, introspective awareness (*saṃprajanya*, *sampajañña*) is considered a type of intelligence (*prajñā*), but it is not wisdom.[104] Wisdom develops from introspective awareness but understands phenomena in a deeper way. Introspective awareness's knowing can range from clearly knowing simple occurrences, such as "now I am moving my arm," to more complex and discriminative knowing, such as knowing the impermanent, transient nature of feelings or the arising of craving dependent on a sense faculty's contact with an object.

Although introspective awareness is not specifically defined in the two *Knowledges*, its opposite, nonintrospective awareness, is. From this we can infer what introspective awareness is. Nonintrospective awareness is not just the lack of introspective awareness; it is a mental factor that is an afflictive intelligence that does not understand an object correctly. Vasubandhu in the *Five Aggregates* says (ISBP 310):

> What is nonintrospective awareness? [It is] intelligence that is concomitant with an affliction and [it is the mental factor] that causes one to engage in activities of body, speech, or mind inattentively.

Sthiramati adds to this that nonintrospective awareness doesn't know what is to be done and what is to be avoided. It functions to allow the increase of destructive actions of body, speech, and mind,

supports the accumulation of transgressions from broken precepts, and hinders the application of the four opponent powers. It also causes whatever wisdom we have developed to degenerate and hinders the further development of analytical wisdom. Nonintrospective awareness is of three types: the nonintrospective awareness (1) that accompanies wrong views, (2) that hinders development of reliable analytical wisdom because it misunderstands the object, and (3) that interrupts serenity because the mind is unable to attend alertly to the meditation object.

Using this as a guideline, we can infer three types of introspective awareness: the introspective awareness that (1) accompanies correct views, (2) understands the object and supports the development of reliable analytical wisdom, and (3) enables the mind to attend to the meditation object and supports the practice of serenity. The first two show that introspective awareness is associated with the cultivation of wisdom, and the third is the introspective awareness associated with serenity. Here introspective awareness is a meta awareness that monitors and is aware of what is happening in the mind. Assessing whether the mind is directed to a virtuous or nonvirtuous object, introspective awareness must be sharp and have a strong element of intelligence. Otherwise, like a foolish spy, it will ruin everything. When I was young, I asked one of my personal attendants to alert me when my senior tutor was coming. But sometimes this attendant slept when he shouldn't have and didn't inform me. Naturally that caused some problems!

Pāli commentaries explain four types or aspects of introspective awareness:

1. With *introspective awareness of purpose* we pause before acting to clarify the purpose of our action. Why am I doing this? Will this action be of benefit or is it best not to do it? This introspective awareness enables us to avoid acting impulsively, foolishly, or by force of habit.

2. *Introspective awareness of suitability* examines the suitability of the circumstances and knows how to achieve the determined purpose or goal most effectively in accordance with the Dharma. In all our activities a beneficial purpose and suitable means are

important. If the purpose is good but how we go about attaining it is unethical or harmful to others, it is not suitable to do.

These two types of introspective awareness apply especially to daily life activities and lead to refined behavior. When we know the purpose of eating we will eat what the body needs but not more. We will not chatter about unsuitable topics because we know the purpose of talking and the suitable circumstances for engaging in conversation.

3. *Introspective awareness of the domain* helps us to keep the mind on the meditation object and propels us back to it should distraction set in. It enables mindfulness and meditation to be continuous. During break times, it brings our minds to the meditation object or another virtuous object.

4. *Introspective awareness of nonignorance* is practiced during meditation on the four establishments of mindfulness and is applied during insight meditation. Regarding the body, feelings, mind, and phenomena, this type of introspective awareness leads to peeling away layers of afflictions that prevent seeing the body and so forth as they actually are. As the layers of afflictions recede, penetrative wisdom analyzes and knows the true nature of physical and mental phenomena, thus dispelling ignorance.

Asaṅga's *Śrāvaka Grounds* speaks of introspective awareness in two ways. The first is in a general context that applies to many activities in the course of the day. This explanation is similar to the first two meanings of introspective awareness in the Pāli tradition. The second is in the specific context of attaining serenity and insight, which includes the latter two meanings.

The General Meaning of Introspective Awareness

Asaṅga describes the general meaning of introspective awareness as a mental factor that is aware of what we are doing and how we are doing it or should do it. Here it is not a technical term and is used as an adverb, as in acting with awareness or abiding in awareness. A person acting with awareness is paying attention to her actions as

well as to the surrounding environment and her relationship to it:[105]

> What is abiding in awareness? Having trained in such a way in staying awake, he now abides with awareness while going and returning, while looking ahead and to the sides, while extending and bending his limbs, while wearing his robes and carrying his outer robes and bowl, while eating and drinking, chewing and tasting, while standing, walking, sitting or lying down (falling asleep), waking up (being awake), talking or being silent, and while removing drowsiness and sleepiness.

This passage is almost identical to one that appears often in the Pāli sūtras, such as *The Discourse to Gaṇaka-Moggallāna* (MN 107.7).[106] Both of these passages are very similar to a passage in *The Twenty-Five-Thousand-Verse Perfection of Wisdom Sūtra* (*Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā-prajñā-pāramitā Sūtra*) that describes the bodhisattva practices (PVS 204, in ISBP 151–52).

> Furthermore, Subhūti, … [the bodhisattva mahāsattva] maintains awareness when he goes [from his residence] or returns; he maintains awareness when looking ahead or looking to the sides; he maintains awareness when bending or extending [his leg, foot, arm, or hand]; he maintains awareness when carrying his outer robe, robes, or alms bowl; he maintains awareness when eating, chewing, drinking, or tasting; he maintains awareness when sleeping or dispelling drowsiness; he maintains awareness when going, coming, standing, sitting, lying down, waking up, speaking, being silent, or retiring in order to practice meditation. O Subhūti, thus does the bodhisattva mahāsattva, one who practices the Perfection of Wisdom, dwell watching the body in relation to the inner body. Moreover, he does not form deliberative thoughts associated with the body, on account of his not apprehending [an inherently existent body]. He is ardent, introspectively aware,

> mindful, having removed longing and displeasure for the world.

The Buddha recommends that bodhisattvas practice awareness in the four physical positions and during all activities, be they mundane such as dressing, conversing, or eating, or specific Dharma activities such as teaching the Dharma or meditating.

Asaṅga explains the meaning of abiding in awareness while going out and returning, activities found in all three passages above:

> Concerning abiding in awareness, while going, he fully knows: "I am going," while returning, he fully knows: "I am returning." He fully knows: "Here I should go, here I should not go." He fully knows: "Now I should go; now I should not go … " This is what is called "awareness."
>
> If he possesses such awareness, while going, he fully knows, "I am going," he only goes where he should go, he only goes when he should go, and he only goes as he should go, in the right manner. This is what is called "abiding in awareness regarding going and returning."

In short, the general meaning of introspective awareness is to know what we are doing when we are doing it and to know how to do it in an appropriate way. When driving a car, we clearly know what we are doing and are not preoccupied with thoughts and worries or with texting. We know where it is suitable for us to go, when to go there, and how to go there. Before turning the car key, we clearly know our destination and the direction to get there. We know if our destination is an appropriate place for us to go. For example, if someone is trying to be sober, it is not wise to meet friends at the bar or visit friends who like to take drugs. We are aware of the appropriate time to do things. When our friend is busy or when we have many tasks to do, it is wise to have a long conversation with that friend later. We are aware of how we are doing something: What is the tone of our voice? What vocabulary are we using? Are we interrupting the other person? Are we

listening with attention and empathy to what they are saying? Being aware of what, where, when, how, and why we are acting in our daily life will facilitate our interactions with others, improve our relationships, and prevent us from acting or speaking in ways that we will later regret.

In another passage Asaṅga discusses lying down, presumably to sleep.

> How does one lie in bed with awareness? When the mind of the person lying down with mindfulness is disturbed by one affliction or another, he knows this disturbance fully, he does not indulge in it, he abandons it, he penetrates it, and he turns away from this thought. Therefore it is called "lying in bed while abiding in awareness."

Here introspective awareness monitors the mind for afflictions, and should one arise, it detects the affliction and prevents it from overwhelming the mind. Introspective awareness propels the application of an antidote — such as viewing the affliction as false and empty — to counteract it. Should anger arise, introspective awareness knows this and without allowing the mind to get lost in vicious thoughts, it turns the mind to meditation on love. This is similar to how introspective awareness functions when developing concentration. In short, Asaṅga says, "How can one be restrained in one's body and speech? By possessing introspective awareness."

Śāntideva agrees (BCA 5:108):

> In brief, this alone is the definition
>
> of introspective awareness:
>
> the repeated examination of the state
>
> and actions of our body and mind.

In *Engaging in the Bodhisattvas' Deeds*, Śāntideva devotes an entire chapter to introspective awareness. It is a delight to read and I strongly encourage you to do so. In an emphatic way that confronts our denial and avoidance, Śāntideva describes the disadvantages of the afflictions and encourages us to act with introspective awareness at all times to prevent them from arising

and to counteract them if they do. He also gives practical advice on how to move our body, speak to others, and watch over our mind, which is the source of verbal and physical actions. If we want to attain awakening and be of benefit to others, mindfulness and introspective awareness are essential.

Śāntideva also speaks of mindfulness and introspective awareness in the context of maintaining the bodhisattva precepts. Having cultivated conscientiousness, we must develop mindfulness and introspective awareness in order to maintain the bodhisattva precepts. Mindfulness remembers the essential points of the bodhisattva ethical code, and introspective awareness monitors the body, speech, and mind to prevent their being controlled by afflictions and to ensure compassion is present. When introspective awareness is absent, afflictions arise, and when it is present, the practice of the six perfections increases.

Introspective Awareness when Training in Serenity

Maitreya speaks of introspective awareness as one of the eight antidotes that counteract the five faults when cultivating serenity. Here "introspective awareness" is a technical term referring to a mental factor that is likened to a spy. It is a corner of the mind that monitors the whole mind and detects if restlessness or laxity has arisen and disturbed our concentration. When refined, introspective awareness is able to discern when restlessness or laxity are about to arise and to prevent that. Asaṅga speaks of introspective awareness in the context of the six powers that lead to single-pointedness:

> Then, by the power of introspective awareness he does not allow [the mind] any room for wandering between signs (sense objects), thoughts, and afflictions, and in such a way he tames and pacifies [the mind].

Asaṅga describes the fifth, sixth, and seventh stages of sustained attention during which introspective awareness is prominent:

> How does he tame? When his mind is distracted by these signs — such as signs of form, sound, smell, taste, touch, and signs of attachment, anger, ignorance, woman, and man — he reaches the recognition that these are disadvantageous from the very beginning. He focuses his mind on this [recognition] and does not give his mind any room to wander among these signs. Thus he tames.
>
> How does he pacify? When his mind is restless due to these thoughts and auxilary afflictions, such as the aspiration for the desire [realm] and so forth, he reaches the recognition that these are disadvantageous from the very beginning. He focuses his mind on this and does not give his mind any room to wander among these thoughts and auxilary afflictions. Thus he pacifies.
>
> How does he thoroughly calm? When these two appear due to forgetfulness, he does not tolerate these thoughts and auxilary afflictions that keep rising again and again, and abandons them. Thus he thoroughly calms.

While mindfulness keeps our attention on the meditation object, introspective awareness recognizes, prevents, and remedies faults in our concentration. It prevents faults by knowing their disadvantages and not allowing the mind to follow after them.

Cultivating mindfulness is the chief cause to gain introspective awareness. When mindfulness is strong, the mind does not forget the object or become distracted easily. When it is distracted, introspective awareness can easily detect it. Śāntideva says (BCA 5:33):

> When mindfulness stands guard
>
> at the gate of the mind,
>
> introspective awareness arrives,
>
> and once it has come, it does not depart again.

In brief, mindfulness functions to focus and stabilize the mind on the meditation object. Introspective awareness functions to not allow it to wander to other objects, or if it has fallen into restlessness or laxity, to remedy that fault.

REFLECTION

1. What are the different types of introspective awareness?
2. What is the role of introspective awareness in daily life? How does it help us live ethically?
3. What is its role when training in serenity?

Mindfulness and Introspective Awareness Working in Tandem

Mindfulness and introspective awareness are intricately related. Mindfulness and introspective awareness are present at the beginning of the practice when we train to become aware of our physical movements. For example, they are at play when new monastics are trained to move in a refined and dignified manner that is suitable for one who has gone forth. In the middle of our practice, they are present when we undertake formal meditation on the body, feelings, mind, and phenomena. At the end of the path, āryas employ mindfulness and introspective awareness in serenity and insight meditation and in the smooth functioning of their daily activities.

They are mentioned together when speaking of the higher training in ethical conduct because mindfulness focuses on what to practice and abandon and introspective awareness sees if our body, speech, and mind are following suit. As a form of intelligence, introspective awareness distinguishes virtuous from corrupted motivations, and mindfulness keeps the mind focused on virtuous intentions.

It is said that with strong mindfulness and introspective awareness, even if a monk sleeps near a woman he will not break his precepts. However, if these two mental factors are weak, even if a

monastic goes to a solitary mountain hermitage, he will eventually transgress the precepts.

In the higher training in concentration, mindfulness stays on the meditation object and introspective awareness surveys the mind and detects hindrances to concentration. Mindfulness then corrects the situation by either returning to the meditation object or focusing on an antidote. Both mindfulness and introspective awareness are among the antidotes to faults that interfere with attaining serenity. Mindfulness counteracts forgetting the meditation object, while introspective awareness protects against and remedies restlessness and laxity.

By developing mindfulness, introspective awareness automatically follows. In *Explanation of "Distinguishing the Middle and the Extremes"* (*Madhyānta-vibhāga-ṭīkā*) Sthiramati says (LC 3:61):

> The statement, "There is recognition of laxity and restlessness by introspective awareness if mindfulness does not lapse," indicates that mindfulness, when fully present, is accompanied by introspective awareness.

When mindfulness is present in the mind, so is introspective awareness. Sometimes the order may be reversed: when mindfulness lapses, introspective awareness detects the presence of an affliction and then mindfulness steps in and focuses on the specific antidote to it.

Although mindfulness and introspective awareness are compatible and work together, each has its own function. In the context of serenity, introspective awareness notices when laxity and restlessness are on the verge of arising, while mindfulness prevents forgetting the meditation object in a flurry of distractions. It's important to distinguish these two.

The name we give a specific meditation practice often has to do with the specific mental factor whose development is emphasized in it. When the cultivation of mindfulness is chief, it is called mindfulness practice, as in the four establishments of mindfulness. When the development of single-pointedness is foremost, it is called serenity practice. When the cultivation of wisdom is

emphasized, it is called the practice of insight. In fact, all three of these mental factors and more are present at the same time.

Taking intoxicants impedes the cultivation of mindfulness and introspective awareness, which in turn leads to accruing all sorts of negativities. Sometimes people are so unaware of what is going on that they wake up in a strange place and don't know how they got there!

Mindfulness and introspective awareness practiced together naturally leads to a calmer and more focused mind. In my own experience, mindfulness of my precepts, which restrains me from involvement with physical and verbal actions, increases mindfulness of my behavior in general. This spurs me to examine what is happening in my mind. As a result, distraction decreases and the mind is drawn inward toward a calm, one-pointed state even when I'm not actively engaged in cultivating serenity.

When anger arises in a well-trained mind, introspective awareness notes, anger has arisen. We become mindful of the sensations anger arouses in the body and the mood in the mind. When we experience anger, it sometimes seems as though our entire self has turned into the nature of anger. Observing the anger as it manifests in the mind — instead of fixating on the story that sparked it — immediately helps dissolve the anger.

Alternatively, introspective awareness identifies the anger and mindfulness remembers karma and its effects: we experience disturbing situations as a result of the actions we have engaged in, so being angry at another person is misplaced. Or we are mindful of the instructions for the taking and giving meditation and focus on imagining taking on others' anger and its effects and giving them our body, wealth, and merit to bring them happiness.

When mindfulness and introspective awareness operate together, we become aware of how swept away we are by sensory objects, the feelings of pleasure and pain experienced upon contact with them, and the emotional whirlwind those feelings produce in our minds. This affects us not only as individuals but also as a culture. I often observe that the current education system is too materialistic and too focused on the pleasure derived from sense

objects that are perceived by sense consciousnesses. Compassion, on the other hand, involves the mental consciousness and brings more peace. For this reason, we need to introduce a better understanding of how the mind works to educators, business people, and others.

It is important to distinguish between conceptual and sensory consciousnesses. When we are thinking seriously or when our mindfulness is strong in meditation, we don't pay attention to sense experience. Understanding these different levels of consciousness opens the door to a deeper understanding of the mind. The inability to distinguish between sensory and mental consciousnesses leads to confusion. This is why I suggest that compared with ancient Indian understanding of the workings of the mind, modern psychology is at a preliminary level.

Mindfulness in Modernity

Some people use the word "mindfulness" to refer to nonjudgmental bare awareness of what is happening in the present moment. Being mindful of the present moment and what is arising in our field of sensual and mental experience helps us to differentiate nonconceptual and conceptual consciousnesses, the former directly perceiving their object, the latter cognizing their object by means of a conceptual appearance.[107] We begin to differentiate the bare experience of sense objects and our internal conceptualizations about them. The stories and opinions our conceptual mind fabricates about these objects not only cause mental suffering here and now but also trigger anger, attachment, resentment, and other disturbing emotions.

Training the mind to have bare attention on what is occurring in the present moment stops the proliferation of mistaken conceptualizations and anxiety about what has happened or what will happen. It calms and focuses the mind. Nowadays, there are many and varied uses of some of the basic principles of mindfulness meditation in a variety of fields, including medicine, psychotherapy, education, sports, business, and corrections

(prisons). Here the principles of mindfulness are employed for specific purposes, such as to reduce chronic pain or mental stress or to increase attention. It is wonderful to see Buddhist teachings benefit a wide range of people in this way.

When bare awareness of the present moment is taught in a secular context, I suggest prefacing the instructions by emphasizing that this is a meditation technique derived from Buddhism. In that way, people who practice mindfulness to reduce stress or chronic pain will neither feel pressured to become Buddhist nor think they are doing the full practice of mindfulness as taught by the Buddha. Similarly, people who are new to Buddhism will understand that mindfulness meditation as taught by the Buddha is done in the context of the four truths and the Buddhist worldview; it is practiced for the purpose of attaining liberation from cyclic existence. They will understand that the Buddha's teachings are expansive; there is much to learn and practice — mindfulness is not the simplified technique they do with an app.

The Thirty-Seven Harmonies with Awakening

The thirty-seven harmonies with awakening are explained in detail in *Treasury of Knowledge* and in Maitreya's *Ornament of Clear Realizations*, *Ornament of Mahāyāna Sūtras* (*Mahāyāna-sūtrālaṃkāra*), and *Differentiation of the Middle and the Extremes* (*Madhyāntavibhāga*). Candrakīrti's *Supplement* speaks of them and Śāntideva's *Guide* discusses the four establishments of mindfulness in the chapter on wisdom. In the Pāli tradition, many sūtras are devoted to the thirty-seven harmonies.

The phrase for the thirty-seven harmonies with awakening in the Tibetan language is *byang chub kyi phyogs kyi chos. Byang* refers to purifying all our afflictions so that once we attain awakening we have the security that they have ceased and will never arise again. Regarding this state of peace, there are three types of awakening: that of the śrāvakas, solitary realizers, and bodhisattvas, the latter being the unsurpassable, supreme awakening. These thirty-seven practices form the common path that creates the causes for actualizing all three states of awakening.

In the structure of the stages of the path, the thirty-seven harmonies with awakening are described under the path of the middle-level practitioner. However, they can also be done with the bodhicitta motivation, in which case they become the path of advanced practitioner and lead to full awakening. The thirty-seven harmonies are also referenced in the Vajrayāna, where, for example, they are symbolized by Yamāntaka's thirty-four arms and body, speech, and mind.

Mention of the thirty-seven harmonies is found throughout the Pāli canon, especially in the fifth part of the *Connected Discourses*, the *Great Book* (*Mahāvagga*). They are likewise spoken of in many sūtras in the Sanskrit canon, the chief source being the *Sūtra on the Ten Grounds*. Here they are spoken of in the context of the fourth bodhisattva ground, the Radiant. Candrakīrti says (MMA 4.2abc):

> There, for the Sugata's children, generated from
>
> higher meditation on the harmonies with full awakening,
>
> arises an appearance [of wisdom] surpassing the [third ground's] copper light ...

The copper light of the fire of perfect pristine wisdom that burns up the afflictions is cultivated based on meditating on the thirty-seven harmonies and on their emptiness of inherent existence.

The passages in the Pāli and Sanskrit canons describing the thirty-seven are remarkably similar. For example, the *Sūtra on the Ten Grounds* in the Sanskrit canon speaks of mindfulness of the body (MMAB 50):

> O Children of the Conqueror [bodhisattvas], the bodhisattva abiding in this bodhisattva ground, the Radiant, having become ardent, introspectively aware, mindful, having removed longing and displeasure for the world, with regard to the inner body contemplates the body and abides. Having become ardent with regard to the outer body, contemplates the body and

> abides … with regard to the inner and outer bodies, contemplates body and abides.

The Twenty-Five-Thousand-Verse Perfection of Wisdom Sūtra contains the same passage. In the Pāli canon, the *Establishments of Mindfulness Sutta* (*Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, MN 10.3.5) says:

> Here a monastic abides contemplating the body as a body, ardent, introspectively aware, mindful, having removed longing and displeasure for the world … In this way, he abides contemplating the body as a body internally, or he abides contemplating the body as a body externally, or he abides contemplating the body as a body both internally and externally.

These are English translations, so most likely the originals in the two canons are exactly the same, the only difference being the Buddha's audience — bodhisattvas in the former, monastics in the latter. The main differences in how the thirty-seven harmonies are practiced in the Śrāvaka Vehicle and in the Mahāyāna is that bodhisattvas do them with the motivation of attaining awakening for the benefit of all sentient beings and apply them to all sentient beings. For example, when establishing mindfulness of the body, bodhisattvas meditate on the impermanence of both their own body and the bodies of others in order to increase their compassion for others. Although śrāvakas may also meditate on the impermanence of others' bodies, it is for the purpose of ending desire for them. From the Prāsaṅgika perspective, practitioners of all three vehicles meditate on the thirty-seven harmonies as being empty of inherent existence.

12 | The Four Establishments of Mindfulness: Body, Feelings, and Mind

THE PURPOSE of the four establishments of mindfulness (*smṛtyupasthāna*, *satipaṭṭhāna*) is to gain direct insight into the nature of our body and mind and to use this wisdom to eliminate the afflictions that bind us to saṃsāra. Through realizing the body and mind are impermanent and unsatisfactory, we want to generate the wisdom realizing emptiness that eradicates the ignorance that is the root of saṃsāra. To gain this insight, sharp mindfulness and deep concentration are necessary; the four establishments of mindfulness accomplish this. These four are called "establishments" because they set up or establish mindfulness; they concern not only the object of mindfulness but also the way mindfulness of these four objects is established.

Mindfulness, introspective awareness, and wisdom are essential components of Dharma practice. They are cultivated on the basis of our body, feelings, mind, and phenomena, which are the main aspects of our experience. Examining them closely challenges our innate conceptions of who we are and how we exist and at the same time helps us understand and release the grasping at I, which is at the center of our being.

In the previous chapter, I expressed my disappointment that the thirty-seven harmonies with awakening in general and the four establishments of mindfulness in particular are not widely practiced by contemporary followers of Tibetan Buddhism. I (Chodron) would like to add to this. Nowadays, most non-Tibetans receive teachings on the lamrim, and after some contemplation of lamrim topics, receive tantric empowerments (*abhiṣeka*, T. *dbang*) or permissions (T. *rjes gnang*), and make tantric sādhanas their daily practice. After a while, some people begin to feel that their practice isn't advancing. I believe one remedy is to spend more time contemplating lamrim topics and meditating on the four establishments of mindfulness before entering Tantra.

Gaining a firm conviction in the Buddhist worldview as explained in the lamrim and Indian treatises stabilizes our mind. By understanding the āryas' four truths and the attendant topics they include, we understand our present situation and how to change it. By practicing the four establishments of mindfulness, we will become intimately familiar with our situation as saṃsāric beings in an experiential way. Before visualizing ourselves as deities with a body made of light and a mind experiencing great bliss in tantric practice, understanding our present body, feelings, mind, and phenomena is

helpful. We will better understand who we are at present, what to practice and abandon on the path, and the purpose and method of Tantra.

In *Precious Garland*, Nāgārjuna comments that realizing the foulness of the body is much easier than realizing emptiness and is a prerequisite to realizing emptiness. Yet we usually skip over the meditation on the body — after all it's rather unpleasant to see what this body is actually made of — and go to emptiness and higher practices. We would have more success if we practiced the topics of the path beginning with the easier ones and progressing to more difficult ones.

Mindfulness on the body, feelings, mind, and phenomena leads us to understand impermanence and emptiness. These four objects are composed of parts: the body is a collection of physical components; the others are continuums composed of moments of consciousness.[108] They exist by being merely designated in dependence on their parts. They also arise due to causes and conditions and are thus dependent on those as well. Anything that is dependent on other factors is not a self-enclosed phenomenon and cannot exist inherently. It is empty of inherent existence. Similarly, the person designated in dependence on them lacks inherent existence. This understanding of emptiness is essential for the practice of Tantra to bring good results and not devolve into simply chanting mantra.

To practice the four establishments of mindfulness successfully, the guidance of a qualified spiritual mentor who is experienced in this meditation is necessary. Following his or her instructions, we learn the context within which these meditations are done (the Buddhist worldview), the motivation with which they are done (the aspiration for liberation or bodhicitta), and how to do them.

It is important to study well the sūtras and commentaries on the four establishments of mindfulness and on mindfulness of the breath. In the Sanskrit tradition these are the *Sūtra on the Ten Grounds* and the fourth chapter of Maitreya's *Ornament of Clear Realizations* (*Abhisamayālaṃkāra*). In the Pāli canon, these are the *Greater Discourse on the Establishments of Mindfulness* (*Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, DN 22), *Discourse on the Establishments of Mindfulness* (*Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, MN 10), *Discourse on Mindfulness of Breathing* (*Ānāpānasati Sutta*, MN 118), and *Discourse on Mindfulness of the Body* (*Kāyagatāsati Sutta*, MN 119).

Some teachers teach the four establishments of mindfulness — especially mindfulness of the breath — as a means to develop serenity; others teach it as a method leading to insight. It may be used in either or both ways. Training the mind to be continually mindful of the meditation object stabilizes and calms the mind, increasing concentration. Mindfulness also knows its object

and its characteristics and qualities well, generating the understanding that leads to insight.

This chapter and the next combine the explanations of both the Sanskrit and Pāli traditions, which are either very similar or complement each other. Since the Sanskrit sūtra, *Sūtra on the Ten Grounds*, and the Pāli sūtra, *Establishment of Mindfulness Sutta* (MN 10), are worded in a similar manner, we'll cite the Pāli passages here.

Introduction to the Four Establishments of Mindfulness

The *Precious Jewel on the Crown Sūtra* (T. *'Phags pa gtsug na rin po che'i mdo*) outlines the function of thoroughly pure mindfulness as follows:

> The mindfulness that ensures the nonarising of the afflictions, the mindfulness that ensures that no opening is given to the ills, the mindfulness that ensures that one does not venture on false or bad paths, and the mindfulness that guards one's mind like a guard at the door against all nonvirtuous minds and mental factors — this is called "thoroughly pure mindfulness."

Of the thirty-seven harmonies, the four establishments of mindfulness are explained at the beginning because all thirty-seven harmonies must be cultivated with mindfulness. The chief objects for us to be mindful of are the body, feelings, mind, and phenomena because these are the basis of designation of the I or person. Establishing mindfulness on these four involves understanding their nature, dependence, function, and reasoning.[109]

A definition of "establishment of mindfulness" is an exalted knower (of someone who has entered a path) included within either mindfulness or wisdom, that meditates on the four — bodies, feelings, minds, and phenomena — through examining the specific and general characteristics of each of them. Although this definition places this practice as one accomplished by a person who has already entered a path of any of the three vehicles, it is also done by people who have not yet entered a path. This practice is powerful and beneficial for everyone.

In the four establishments of mindfulness, the meaning of "mindfulness" is slightly different than in other contexts. As before, here mindfulness functions to keep the mind on its chosen object; in addition it is combined with powerful wisdom that understands the four objects. Thus establishing mindfulness means to place our mindfulness on an object comprehended by wisdom. Of the four objects, "body" refers to three kinds of body — the internal, external, and both internal and external. The *internal body* consists of the five sense faculties, such as the eye faculty. These are subtle forms located

in the coarse sense organ. They are considered internal because they are associated with our own mind in that they enable our sense consciousnesses to perceive external objects. The *external body* refers to the environment and things in it that are the five sense objects: visual sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile objects. It can also refer to the sense faculties of others. The body that is *both internal and external* refers to the coarse physical sense organs, the eyeball and so forth. These organs are external compared to the sense faculties and internal because they are associated with feeling.[110] Practitioners meditate on these, "forsaking covetousness and displeasure concerning the world." Forsaking covetousness is to abandon attachment and forsaking displeasure is to abandon mental unhappiness, which is the cause of anger.

Feelings refer to our feelings of pleasure, pain, and neutral feelings. A pleasant feeling or happiness is the experience of contentment. An unpleasant feeling or unhappiness is the experience of pain. A neutral feeling — also called "equanimity" — is a feeling that is neither contentment nor pain. Some feelings, such as mental happiness of thinking about an enjoyable situation, accompany a mental consciousness, while other feelings, such as the unpleasant feeling of pain in the body, accompany sense consciousness. The *Sūtra on the Ten Grounds* speaks of bodhisattvas meditating on inner, outer, and both inner and outer feelings. Inner feelings are those we ourselves experience, outer feelings are those experienced by others, and inner and outer feelings are the pleasurable, painful, or neutral feelings experienced by the tactile consciousness in the coarse physical sense organs.

The mind refers to the six primary consciousnesses. When describing the practice of the four establishments of mindfulness, the *Sūtra on the Ten Grounds* instructs us to be mindful of inner, outer, and both inner and outer thoughts or minds. The *inner mind* is the mental consciousness, the *outer mind* is the sense consciousnesses, and the *inner and outer mind* is the mind that apprehends the sense organs. Becoming mindful of these involves knowing if these minds are virtuous or nonvirtuous, with or without attachment, accompanied by animosity or not.

Phenomena includes all other phenomena — both impermanent and permanent — that have not been included in body, feelings, and mind. These are mental objects (phenomena source, *dharmāyatana*). Some examples are mental factors other than feelings, abstract composites, and unconditioned phenomena, including nirvāṇa. *Inner phenomena* are true paths, *outer phenomena* are true cessations, and *inner and outer phenomena* are persons.

The reason these four objects are selected as objects of mindfulness is to show us ordinary beings four conceptual errors:

1. Conceiving our body to be the residence or place where the self resides: I am here, inside my body.

2. Conceiving our feelings to be what the self enjoys and experiences: I feel happy. I feel miserable. I feel indifferent.
3. Conceiving our mind to be a real self: I am what thinks and perceives.
4. Conceiving phenomena — in particular mental factors — as what make the self afflictive or worthwhile: I have so many problems with anger and jealousy, or, I am worthwhile because I am mindful, make effort, and have concentration and wisdom. We see destructive emotions and wrong views as something the person, the I, should purify, and constructive mental factors as something we should adopt.

The way the self is conceived in each of these instances is erroneous; there is a notion of a "solid" personal identity. We see our self as standing alone, independent from everything else, and view all other things — including our body, feelings, mind, and phenomena — as arranged around that self. In addition, our present way of conceiving and relating to our body, feelings, mind, and phenomena increases our misconception of self.

Another reason these four are selected as objects of mindfulness is to help us understand how destructive and constructive actions come about so that we can abandon the former and practice the latter.

1. The body is the chief object involved in our actions.

2. Feelings are the aim for which we do these actions: we seek to experience pleasant feelings and to avoid unpleasant ones.

3. The mind is the agent that causes these actions. Our actions don't just happen; the mental factor of intention causes us to act.

4. Various mental factors, such as attachment and animosity, constitute the motivating force for our actions. Because mental factors such as various emotions, attitudes, and views motivate our actions, we must be attentive to what we allow to occupy our awareness.

REFLECTION

Investigate assumptions in your mind that may be so habitual you don't recognize them. Identify in your experience these four conceptual errors:

1. Conceiving your body to be the place where a real self resides: I am here, inside my body.
2. Conceiving your feelings to be what a real self experiences: I feel happy. I feel miserable. I feel indifferent.
3. Conceiving your mind to be a real self: I am what thinks and perceives.

4. Conceiving phenomena — especially mental factors — as what make a real self afflictive or purified: I am good because I am compassionate. I am bad because I am spiteful.

Shared and Specific Characteristics

To cultivate insight by analyzing the nature of the body, feelings, mind, and phenomena, we examine both the characteristics they share and those specific to each.

Shared Characteristics

The *shared characteristics* that all four objects have in common are that they are impermanent, duḥkha (unsatisfactory in nature), empty, and selfless. These four characteristics relate to the first three of the four seals that distinguish the Buddha's teaching:[111]

1. All conditioned phenomena are impermanent; they change moment by moment without ever remaining static.
2. All polluted phenomena are unsatisfactory or suffering in nature — that is, they are under the influence of disturbing attitudes and polluted actions.
3. All phenomena are empty and selfless. By understanding these three seals, we come to realize:
4. Nirvāṇa is peace.

Specific Characteristics

In terms of their specific characteristics, each of the four objects of mindfulness is related to one of four distorted conceptions: (1) regarding what is unattractive as attractive, (2) regarding what is suffering in nature as pleasant or happy, (3) regarding the impermanent as permanent, and (4) regarding the selfless as having a self.

In relation to the four objects of mindfulness, we regard the *body* as clean and attractive, feelings as pleasant or happy, mind as permanent, and phenomena as having a self. The first three distorted conceptions chain us to preoccupations with only the happiness of this life and thus hinder our Dharma practice on a fundamental level. The main meditations to counteract this obsessive preoccupation with this life are mindfulness of the body and mindfulness of feelings. For this reason, these are described as foundational practices, although when done by advanced practitioners they also lead to

liberation. In the stages of the path, this same purpose of subduing obsession with the happiness of this life is accomplished by reflecting on four factors that turn the mind to the Dharma: precious human life, impermanence and death, the law of karma and its effects, and the disadvantages of cyclic existence.

In addition, each object of mindfulness is correlated to one of the four truths.[112]

1. Mindfulness of the body entails contemplating the unattractiveness of the body. In doing so, we are not fabricating foul characteristics and projecting them onto the body, but are simply examining the body and knowing what it is. Through this we understand true duḥkha, the first truth.

2. Mindfulness of feelings demonstrates that all feelings of pleasure, pain, and neutral feelings are the nature of duḥkha; they are unsatisfactory in nature. Even though we may sometimes feel pleasure, it doesn't last and leads to unhappiness. Even when we have neutral feelings, the stage is set for pain to arise at any time. Understanding the unsatisfactory nature of feelings helps us to understand craving, and knowing this leads us to understand that ignorance is the source of suffering. In this way, we come to understand true origins of suffering, the second truth.

3. Mindfulness of the mind reveals the mind to be changeable and momentary, arising and passing away in each moment. This helps us to recognize that the mind is empty of an independent I. Understanding the changing nature of the mind stimulates us to aspire for liberation and gives us a better understanding of true cessations, the third truth.

4. Mindfulness of phenomena clarifies the mental factors and behaviors to abandon on the path and those to adopt. This develops our understanding of true paths, the fourth truth.

Practicing mindfulness here means to first employ wisdom and intelligence to understand the nature of these four objects through analytical meditation. Then we maintain mindfulness on them to become more familiar with their characteristics.

REFLECTION

1. Contemplate the relationship between mindfulness of the body, mindfulness of feelings, mindfulness of the mind, and mindfulness of phenomena and the four truths. Why is mindfulness of the body correlated with true duḥkha, mindfulness of feelings with true origins, mindfulness of the mind with true cessations, mindfulness of phenomena with true paths?
2. Why is mindfulness of all four objects important?

The Objects of Mindfulness, Distorted Conceptions, and Truths

OBJECT OF MINDFULNESS	MISCONCEPTION	UNDERSTANDING OF A SPECIFIC CHARACTERISTIC	ĀRYA TRUTH
Body	Holding the foul as clean	The body is foul in nature	Truth of duḥkha
Feelings	Holding what is unsatisfactory (duḥkha) in nature as pleasurable	Feelings are unsatisfactory in nature	Truth of the origins of duḥkha
Mind	Holding what is momentary as permanent	The mind arises and passes away each moment	Truth of cessation
Phenomena	Holding what lacks a self as having a self	Phenomena are not the self. Some phenomena are to be practiced and others abandoned.	Truth of the path

The meditations on the four establishments of mindfulness are explained below. Because there are many meditations for each of the four objects, summarizing the instructions as reflections for you to do would make the book too long. Please pause after each section, write out the steps of each meditation, and then guide yourself in doing the meditation. Each time you do a meditation, you will discover more about the body, feelings, mind, and phenomena.

Mindfulness of the Body (Kāyasmṛti, Kāyagatāsati)

We are embodied beings and much of our lives revolves around our bodies. Thus the body is the first of the four objects to be examined. Establishing mindfulness of the body brings a clear understanding of what the body is and what it means to have a body.

Mindfulness of the body involves reflecting on the causes of the body, the nature of the body, and the result of the body. Mindfulness investigates the body and sees that although it appears to the contrary, it is not clean and attractive, it is impermanent, it cannot provide genuine happiness or pleasure, and it is not a self. This reduces our attachment to it, which decreases worry and obsession about the body.

The *causes* of the body are the sperm and egg. These are not attractive substances that we like to see. They come from the lower part of the body, and people usually consider them unclean. If they were here on the table, we

would clean the table! They're not like honey, which we enjoy, or milk, which we appreciate!

The *nature* of our present body is not desirable, even though superficially it may have good shape, color, or size. But if it were cut open, we would see muscles, tissue, tendons, organs, bones, blood, and marrow. Look at anatomy books with photographs of the insides of the body or observe an autopsy, as many Theravādin monastics do. Doing this counteracts unrealistic notions that the body is clean and attractive and the source of pleasure.

No matter how expensive and well-prepared is the food we eat, it all becomes feces. Our body is like a machine for producing filth. If this machine works properly, our stool is neither too hard nor too soft. But if something goes wrong with the machine, we suffer from diarrhea or constipation. Everything that comes out of our body — urine, feces, sweat, saliva, earwax, mucus, and so forth — is considered dirty, and we wipe it away. Unless we use our human body properly by not harming others and benefiting them as much as we can, eating food and taking care of this body do not have much meaning.

If we concentrate properly, we see that each part of the body is unattractive. Our eyes may look beautiful on the outside, but if we look at the inside of the eyeball, it is hardly beautiful. Similarly, someone may have soft, beautiful skin, but underneath it are blood, intestines, a stomach, liver, brain, lymph, and a skeleton. The body is so delicate that it's almost unbelievable that all of these organs function together so that the body remains alive.

We usually see our own and others' bodies as solid, permanent, and real, and we easily become enamored with them and are attracted by their superficial appearance without looking at what they really are. But when we look deeply at the nature of the body, it becomes obvious that regarding it as clean and beautiful is a wrong conception.

The *result* of our body is a corpse. In meditation, we visualize a body that has recently died. Then we imagine its appearance after one day, two days, three, four, and five days. It smells horrible, turns a disgusting color, becomes disfigured, and rots. Clearly the end result of this body is nothing desirable. We regard our body as something very dear and take very good care of it, giving it every possible comfort. Yet it will eventually become a corpse that we find very disgusting and fearful.

In addition, while we are alive our body is the basis of illness and injury; it is the source of much pain, worry, fear, and aggravation. We have to work hard to feed, clothe, shelter, and protect this body. Then we must spend time making it look nice and smell wonderful to disguise its actual looks and odor. We must work hard to earn money so we can buy the things our body needs. Seeking money, possessions, and resources for the sake of the survival and

comfort of our bodies is the basis for fighting wars, cheating others, and becoming greedy, miserly, and fearful. Looking at it from this perspective, we see that the body is the basis of so many troubles — economic problems, environmental pollution, war, crime, overpopulation, and social injustice.

Through practicing mindfulness of the body, we clearly see that the body is in the nature of duḥkha. This does not mean that everything about the body is loathsome. It is also the basis that supports our wonderful human intelligence, which, if used properly, enables us to practice Dharma and attain awakening. From this perspective, this body is valuable and a precious human life is treasured. Seeing the body realistically with wisdom, we neither despise it nor are infatuated with it. We keep it healthy and clean and relatively comfortable so that it can be utilized for Dharma practice.

Balance is crucial. On the one hand, we value this body and use it to engage in positive actions, Dharma practice, and activities that benefit ourselves and others. On the other hand, attachment to the body leads to self-indulgence as well as anger when the body becomes ill, is in pain, and dies. A balanced perspective relates to the body in a healthy way. We know our present body is true duḥkha, yet we must protect it because it is the basis of our precious human life.

These perspectives are not contradictory. From the perspective of being impermanent, made of foul substances, under the influence of afflictions and karma, and the basis for pain, the body is not something to cherish. From the perspective of it being the physical basis for a precious human life in which we have all conducive circumstances to practice the Dharma, progress on the path, and attain liberation and awakening, the body is to be cherished and cared for. These two perspectives are cultivated at different stages of the path and serve different purposes. To arouse enthusiasm for Dharma practice, we rejoice at having a human body. To strengthen our aspiration for liberation and awakening, we see the undesirability of this body and thus abandon the attachment to it that keeps us bound in saṃsāra. Thus we practice the middle way of caring for this body with a Dharma motivation. We don't torture it, but we don't indulge it either.

The purpose of meditating with mindfulness on the body is to see the body as it really is, without the fantasies we habitually project on it. These fantasies lead people to have two main attitudes toward their body. In the first, we indulge in the pleasures the body can provide, giving it everything possible so that it will bring us happiness. In the second, we are adversarial, resenting various aspects of our body and fighting with it.

The first attitude is probably more prevalent. It is what fuels us to seek sensual pleasure in whatever way possible: comfortable furniture, swimming pools, sports, food, drugs, sex, and so forth. When we look around we see that

most businesses are involved with providing the body with comfort and pleasure in one way or another, directly or indirectly. Gyms, pharmacies, hair stylists, vacation resorts, sports equipment, massages, furniture, restaurants, and so on directly cater to physical comfort. Banks, schools, and other service industries provide societal infrastructure that supports these activities.

The other attitude is an adversarial one, in which we are in conflict with our body. We hate the body because it doesn't look the way we want it to; we fear our body falling ill, getting injured, aging, and dying.

These dysfunctional ways of relating to the body are based on seeing it as permanent and thus expecting the body to remain in good health and to live without limits. Believing that the body has the capacity to bring us happiness, we indulge in sense pleasures and are angry when old pleasures are no longer enjoyable. By clinging to the body as I or mine, our identity and value as a human being becomes tied to our bodies, or seeing the body as my possession, we are fearful of losing it at the time of death.

Throughout the ages, people have suffered tremendously due to holding distorted conceptions about their bodies. This anguish is especially noticeable today, and our efforts to distract ourselves from it often create more misery. However, putting continuous energy into mindfulness of the body will result in realistic notions and expectations regarding the body, and these in turn will lessen misery in relation to our bodies. Mindfulness of the body is as necessary now as it was when the Buddha taught it twenty-six centuries ago. This practice, when properly and fully done, leads to well-being in the present and to liberation in the long term.

REFLECTION

1. What are the purposes of meditating with mindfulness of the body?
2. Some people feel resistant to doing this meditation because they are concerned it will reinforce negative views of the body they learned as children, because they are artists or scientists and find the body fascinating to paint, sculpt, or study, or because they enjoy intimate physical relationships and this meditation will affect that. Do you find hesitation or resistance in yourself? If so, where is it coming from?
3. What ideas do you have for how to soften this resistance? Try using them.

In the *Establishments of Mindfulness Sutta*, the Buddha detailed several meditation objects for mindfulness of the body: the breath, four postures, foulness, elements, and corpses. The instructions on how to do these meditations are described clearly below. Rather than repeat them in a series of reflections, please pause after each section and do the meditation. Doing each new meditation several times will increase your comfort with it.

Mindfulness of Breathing (Ānāpānasmṛti, Ānāpānasati)

According to traditional accounts, on the night of his awakening, the Buddha meditated on mindfulness on the breath. This mindfulness extends to all four objects of mindfulness. The Buddha instructs (MN 10.4):

> How does a monastic abide contemplating the body as a body? Here a monastic ... sits down; having folded his legs crosswise, set his body erect, and established mindfulness in front of him, (1) ever mindful he breathes in, mindful he breathes out. (2) Breathing in long, he understands, "I breathe in long," or breathing out long, he understands, "I breathe out long." Breathing in short, he understands, "I breathe in short," or breathing out short, he understands, "I breathe out short." (3) He trains thus, "I shall breathe in experiencing the whole body [of breath]," he trains thus, "I shall breathe out experiencing the whole body [of breath]." (4) He trains thus, "I shall breathe in calming the bodily formation"; he trains thus, "I shall breathe out calming the bodily formation."

There are four phases of mindfulness of breathing. In the first, be aware of and observe each in and out breath. In the second, mindfulness deepens so that while breathing a long breath in and out, observe and understand that you are breathing this way. When breathing in and out short, observe and understand that this is a short breath. Understanding introduces introspective awareness as a support for mindfulness. In addition to being aware of a long or short breath, comprehend that it is long or short. "Long" seems to imply a coarse breath and "short" a more refined breath. Don't think, "I'm breathing in long" and so forth, but observe and understand the breath.

In the third phase, be aware of and observe the entire action of breathing in, from when it starts, through the middle of each in breath, to the natural end of that inhalation. While breathing out, be aware of and observe the entire out breath from beginning to end with mindfulness. According to the Pāli commentarial interpretation, "the whole body" refers to the entire in or out breath. Here mindfulness doesn't simply notice the inhalation and exhalation, it experiences it. The mind must be in the present moment to fully experience and understand each portion of each breath. This practice develops the continuity of mindfulness so that the mind does not wander as you breathe.

Some contemporary teachers say that "the whole body" means that mindfulness is extended to experience the entire physical body while mindfully inhaling and exhaling.

In the fourth phase, while you breathe, calm the breath, making it tranquil, soft, and gentle. "The bodily formation" refers to breathing in and

out. Because the breath is connected to so many other physical and mental processes, breathing mindfully in this way calms the entire body and mind, making them peaceful.

While being mindful of the breath, don't forcefully control the breath. Accept the breathing pattern that is present at any particular moment, knowing that the texture, tempo, and other aspects of the breath will naturally change as mindfulness deepens. As the mind becomes more concentrated, the breath will naturally become calmer and slower.

Most commentaries recommend attending to the breath at the nostrils and upper lip. It seems that this point is more conducive for generating the nimitta, or sign, spoken of in serenity meditation. Some meditation teachers recommend observing the breath at any point in the body where it can be experienced distinctly, such as the abdomen or the chest. Perhaps for some people these points are more conducive for cultivating insight.

The Buddha then continued, giving instructions on mindfulness of the body to generate insight (MN 10.5):

> In this way, (1) he abides contemplating the body as a body internally, or he abides contemplating the body as a body externally, or he abides contemplating the body as a body both internally and externally. (2) Or else he abides contemplating in the body its nature of arising, or he abides contemplating in the body its nature of passing away, or he abides contemplating in the body its nature of both arising and passing away. (3) Or else mindfulness that "there is a body" is simply established in him to the extent necessary for bare knowledge and mindfulness. (4) And he abides freely, not clinging to anything in the world. That is how a bhikkhu abides contemplating the body as a body.

This four-part verse is a refrain following each of the meditations explained in mindfulness of the body. A similar verse follows the meditations on mindfulness of feelings, mind, and phenomena, substituting those words for "body." In the context of mindfulness on the breath, the first part is to observe the breath internally (the breath in our own body), externally (the breath in others' bodies), and internally and externally (the breath in our own and others' bodies alternately). The emphasis here is on experiencing the breath in your own body. Sometimes focus on the fact that others are breathing. This makes us aware that all of us are alike in breathing to stay alive, all of us are conditioned by our breath, and our breath itself is conditioned by other factors such as our lungs.

The second part is to contemplate that the breath has the nature of arising and passing away. This is done in two ways: by contemplating the causes and conditions of the body and by contemplating our direct experience of arising

and ceasing. In terms of causes and conditions, the body arises as a result of various factors — ignorance, craving, and karma in previous lives being chief. The sperm, egg, and food are conditions producing the body in this life. Because the body is alive, breathing occurs. In considering the breath specifically, the conditions are the nostrils, trachea, lungs, diaphragm, and so forth. The body ceases with the cessation of ignorance, craving, and karma, or more immediately, from the lack of food or breath or because of illness or injury.

Direct experience occurs when mindfulness is subtle and is extended throughout the entire body so that it is aware of the arising and ceasing of the breath as well as other processes in the body, such as digestion, circulation, and elimination. Contemplating this leads to understanding subtle impermanence — nothing remains in the next moment; momentary change is the nature of functioning things. With more practice, this meditation brings direct insight into the impermanence of all physical and mental phenomena, which in turn leads to insight into the two other characteristics, duḥkha and no-self.

In the third part, by observing the breath, mindfulness establishes that there is a body. Here mindfulness has been well developed; deliberate effort is not necessary to be mindful of the in and out breaths or the long and short breaths. Instead, by focusing on the action of breathing, mindfulness is placed on the body as a whole. As soon as mindfulness of the body is established, the awareness of the arising and ceasing of its components arises easily. Observing this, the understanding arises that the body and breath are impersonal phenomena; there is no self in them. This leads to insight knowledge.

Here it is evident that mindfulness meditation is not simply bare attention to what thoughts or perceptions pass through the mind. The Buddha prescribed particular objects to focus on, to study, to become familiar with, and to examine. We are to understand specific characteristics of these objects, such as their impermanent nature. Such mindfulness leads us to realizations.

The fourth part describes the result of meditating as outlined above: a practitioner is free from clinging to things of this world; his mind is free from the tumult caused by attachment and animosity regarding sense objects, ideas presented in the media, his friends' approval or disapproval, or his reputation. Although this is not yet the ultimate goal of nirvāṇa, it is a step in that direction that brings internal peace.

Sixteen special ascendant practices associated with the breath are explained in the *Sūtra on the Mindfulness of Breathing* (*Anāpānasati Sutta*, MN 118). They are sixteen steps or aspects of mindfulness of the breath. The first four have to do with mindfulness of the body. While breathing in and

out, one contemplates (1) the long in and out breaths, (2) the short in and out breaths, (3) experiencing the whole body, and (4) calming the bodily formation.

The second four correspond to mindfulness of feelings. While breathing in and out, one contemplates (5) experiencing joy, (6) experiencing bliss, (7) experiencing the mental formation (feeling and discrimination), and (8) calming the mental formation.

The third set of four regard mindfulness of the mind. While breathing in and out, one contemplates (9) experiencing the mind, (10) gladdening the mind, (11) concentrating the mind, and (12) liberating the mind.

The fourth set are mindfulness of phenomena. While breathing in and out, one contemplates (13) impermanence, (14) fading away, (15) observing cessation, and (16) contemplating relinquishment.

Mindfulness in the Four Postures

Maintaining mindfulness with the four postures of the body — walking, sitting, standing, and lying down — is taught at the beginning and is practiced throughout our training. Whatever activity we do — sweeping, eating, drinking, defecating, talking — we train in mindfulness and introspective awareness.[113] Please refer back to the discussion in chapter 11.

In brief, know what you are doing when you are doing it. Be aware of not only the body's movement but also how it is moving — quickly, slowly, gently, or with agitation. Instead of letting the mind go here and there following whatever thought enters it, be fully present with the body, not thinking about the past or the future.

Mindfulness of the four postures supplements other mindfulness practices in that it is done during the break times between formal meditation sessions. In the forest traditions of Southeast Asia, a meditator does retreat in a hut (*kuti*) with a nearby stretch of smooth ground or flat stones about thirty steps long for walking meditation. Sometimes a bench is placed on either end so that the meditator can do walking meditation for some time and then sit for formal meditation.

To begin walking meditation, be mindful of the right foot and left foot stepping. Upon reaching the end of the walkway, pause and be mindful of standing. Then turn slowly and pause — being aware of those motions — and begin to walk again, being aware of the right foot and left foot moving.

To make mindfulness subtler, divide each step into three phases — lifting the foot, pushing it forward, and placing it down — and be mindful of each phase. An intention to lift, push, and place the foot precedes each movement;

become aware of those as well. Our mindfulness rests on the six phases: intention to lift, lifting, intention to push, pushing, intention to place, placing. After becoming proficient in being mindful of each of these phases, be mindful of ever-smaller moments of intention and movement of the feet. When strong mindfulness is developed, perceiving the arising and ceasing of hundreds of tiny intentions and hundreds of tiny actions in each second becomes possible.

Similarly, when sitting, standing, or lying down, use mindfulness to scan the body from the crown to toes and up again, being aware of the momentary components of bodily functions and their arising and passing away. This mindfulness, when combined with introspective awareness and analysis, leads to wisdom, as explained in the next section of the sūtra.

Mindfulness of the four postures brings awareness of body language, how we move through space, the way we greet others, the tone and volume of our voice. Just slowing down enough to be aware of each activity will calm the mind and stop the hurried and harried flurry in which many people live. As we become more habituated to observing our physical movements, they will become gentler, and how people react to us will change as well.

Mindfulness brings awareness of interdependence — how our actions influence others and the environment and how they in turn affect us. We become aware: Are we tossing trash in the garbage can or on the roadside? Are we cutting in line or allowing others to go first?

While this practice has a positive effect on our lives here and now, do not be satisfied with that. Remember the real purpose of mindfulness practice is liberation from saṃsāra and persevere so that your practice goes in that direction. This is done by observing the three characteristics — impermanence, duḥkha, and no-self — in all actions. With mindfulness dissect each activity into small physical elements or gestures and into tiny moments of action. Then use wisdom to investigate if there is a self in any of these components. Is there a real me who is willing them or doing them?

Examine each situation carefully to avoid grasping "I go" or "The action is produced by me." Observe each component of the action of going from the intention to the movement to the completion of the movement. Understand "I am walking" to be nothing more than the activities of the physical elements. There is no independent person instigating or doing this action.

While a self-existent, continuous entity appears to be moving in an uninterrupted fashion, it is nothing but a series of mental and physical phenomena arising and passing away. Having come into being, they break up right on the spot. Who is the one going? To whom does the act of going forward belong, when ultimately there are only the ever-changing moments of mental and physical phenomena that vanish as soon as they arise?

The greater the mindfulness and introspective awareness during daily life activities, the stronger they will be during meditation sessions. Several practical benefits accrue as well. Aware of the needs of the body, we will eat the right amount without overeating or depriving ourselves of nourishment. Accidents caused by careless movements are prevented. Mindful of speech, we avoid harsh words and other verbal nonvirtues. Mindfulness when listening reduces instances of misinterpreting others' words and jumping to conclusions.

While effort is necessary when establishing mindfulness, avoid making the mind tight. Keep mindfulness on the object in a soft and gentle way. Simply train the mind continuously. As mindfulness deepens and becomes more continuous, it naturally becomes aware of and sensitive to subtler mental and physical occurrences. We cannot force ourselves to be aware of subtle objects such as the momentary intentions and physical elements involved in walking. Nevertheless, in practicing walking meditation over a long period of time, you will come to observe mental and physical processes on very subtle levels — for example, experiencing each intention and movement in micro detail and observing them in micro moments as they arise and pass away.

Mindfulness of the Foulness of the Body

Meditation on the parts of the body is found in all Buddhist traditions, and it has many purposes. By observing the body in a straightforward manner, we know the body for what it is on the conventional level and realize that it is not worthy of attachment. This lessens our attachment to the body, which eases mental and physical tension. It also sparks the aspiration for liberation. The mindfulness practice can lead to serenity, and when insight wisdom is applied, it can bring us to nirvāṇa.

A principal way attachment to the body arises is sexual lust, which is based on distorted attention viewing the body as clean and attractive. Mindfulness of the parts of the body counteracts this; however, this meditation does not imply that the body is evil or sinful. Rather, closely observing this object of intense attachment releases undue obsession with our own and others' bodies, and in this way enables us to have a healthier relationship with our body.

We may think that mindfulness of the parts of the body will make our mind agitated. In fact, many people experience that the mind becomes more peaceful and concentrated when contemplating, "what really is the body?" which allows deeper understanding and the wisdom of impermanence, duḥkha, and no-self to arise. This practice changes us because what we used to see in an incorrect manner we now know as it actually is. What we used to

hold as stable and permanent we now know is constantly arising and ceasing. What we used to see as beautiful is in fact foul. What we formerly saw as the source of pleasure is recognized to be unsatisfactory. Previously we saw the five aggregates as the self or as a desirable possession for the self. Now we clearly see they are not, and this brings a sense of joy and bliss. The sharpness and clarity of mind can last for days and is blissful. Once we experience this type of joy, the seeming pleasure arising from sensual objects becomes uninteresting and pointless.

Buddhaghosa explains mindfulness of the parts of the body (Vism 8.42). The meditation session may begin with mindfulness of breathing to calm the mind and then continue with mindfulness of the various parts of the body. This can be our own body, called "contemplating the body internally," or the bodies of others, called "contemplating the body externally."

The Buddha mentioned thirty-two parts of the body to be mindful of. In this practice we become aware of each part one by one, observing and investigating its characteristics. The thirty-two parts of the body are broken into six groups:

1. skin pentad: head hair, body hair, nails, teeth, skin
2. kidney pentad: muscles, tendons, bones, marrow, kidneys
3. lungs pentad: heart, liver, connective tissue (covering of the muscles), spleen, lungs
4. brain pentad: intestines, mesentery (supporting membranes), gorge (contents of stomach), feces, brain
5. fat hexad: bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat
6. urine hexad: tears, grease,[114] spit, snot, oil of the joints, urine

Begin by focusing mindfulness on the skin pentad, which consists of the physical features we see when looking at a person. Place mindfulness on each part, one by one, observing its color, shape, texture, location in the body, and surrounding tissue. What is the hair on my head? Is it attractive in itself? What is it made of? When I think of my hair separate from the rest of the body, does it appear attractive to me?

Mindfully observe each component of the skin pentad in this way, saying its name and contemplating it. After contemplating the head hair, body hair, nails, teeth, and skin, proceed backward, contemplating each one again until you reach the head hair. Then go forward, contemplating each element of the skin pentad again and continuing on to the kidney pentad — muscles, tendons, bones, marrow, and kidneys. Then contemplate those in reverse, going back to head hair and forward again to kidneys, followed by the lungs pentad. Some teachers say that instead of going back to head hair each time, it

is fine to go back to the initial member of that pentad or hexad. In this way, become familiar with all aspects of each body part.

By focusing continuously on parts of the body, clearly see them for what they are. No matter how we decorate this body, anointing it with scent and decorating it with beautiful clothes and ornaments, it remains a carcass. This is rather humbling to realize, but by subduing attachment to the body, the mind becomes more peaceful as we cease to worry about how we look and are less distracted by others' physical appearance.

To do in-depth meditation on the unattractiveness of the body, memorize the thirty-two parts. Then contemplate each part while reciting its name mentally. When saying the name, don't think in an abstract way about that body part, but locate it in your own body and become aware that it is inside you. Contemplate, "What I call 'my body' is just a collection of these ugly parts." Don't recite them so quickly that you skim over the qualities, and don't recite them so slowly that you get so immersed in the details that you lose the overall point of the meditation.

With practice, it will not be necessary to contemplate all the body parts in order to generate the awareness of the body's foul nature. Focus on a few of the more prominent parts that easily make that awareness arise in you. If you are doing this meditation to attain dhyāna, select and focus on one part that stands out most strongly and arouses the awareness of unattractiveness quickly. For many but not all people, this is the bones and skeleton.

Now go on to contemplate the arising and passing away of the body parts individually and of the body as a whole. This leads to insight meditation on impermanence.

When mindfulness of the body focuses on the unattractive nature of the body, it becomes a serenity meditation. When it investigates the various components of the body, it becomes insight meditation.[115]

The sūtra continues with the refrain that was explained above. Initially contemplate your own body (contemplating the body as a body internally), and then others' bodies (contemplating the body as a body externally). When doing the latter, begin by contemplating the bodily parts of someone for whom you do not have great desire and then expand it to all sentient beings, including those that you find physically attractive. Then alternate contemplating your own and others' bodies (contemplating the body as a body both internally and externally).

When you become so familiar with the meditation that just saying the names verbally or mentally makes awareness of the unattractiveness of that part arise in the mind, then stop emphasizing the names and focus on their

ugliness. The aim is to lessen sexual desire for others' bodies and to eliminate the thought that taking another body in saṃsāra is desirable.

When you practice, sometimes mindfulness is strong and sometimes it is weak. That is normal. By continuing to practice, the ability to maintain the continuity of mindfulness and introspective awareness increases. As this occurs, concentration and wisdom will arise, as will the wisdom derived from meditation.

This meditation is an excellent way to check if our notion of the body corresponds to what the body actually is. It counteracts the idealized image of the body the media presents. We usually see the seemingly attractive bodies of models in magazines or movies and wish either that we could look like them or that we could meet someone who looks like them. This causes much mental distress, for try as we might, we never succeed in looking as attractive as we would like. By examining what the bodies of models, sports heroes, and movie stars are composed of, we become more realistic and see that basing our self-esteem on the youth, agility, strength, or attractiveness of the body is unwise. Our potential for awakening is a much more reliable basis for self-esteem than the body, which is composed of foul parts and which gets old, sick, and dies.

As part of practicing mindfulness of the body, Thai monks go to hospitals to observe autopsies. When I (Chodron) was in Thailand, I did that and found it very beneficial for my practice. I observed as they cut the scalp and peeled it back over the head. It reminded me of the expression "wearing a mask," for that's what our face is in relation to the skull. When the doctor reached in and popped the brain out, it became clear that the brain was not the person. The brain is just organic matter; it is not a sentient being who thinks and who feels happiness and sorrow. I did not find the innards frightening or disgusting at all; this is simply the reality of the body. In fact, my mind became calm, and the petty things that usually clutter it vanished.

Mindfulness of the body includes contemplating its impermanence, its nature of continual change. On the gross level, the body ages and dies. On the subtle level, it does not remain as it is for a second moment; it is in a state of continual flux, the perpetual instability of arising and disintegrating each moment. Contemplating this we understand why the body causes us so much pain and suffering and why it can never bring true satisfaction. Seeing these aspects of impermanence and duḥkha clearly, we realize that the body is also not a self. It is not something we can control or something that belongs to us. It is simply a material object composed of elements and parts that are in continuous flux.

Contemplating the body leads to a deeper understanding of the nature of external phenomena — mountains, trees, cars, money, and so forth. They too

are impermanent, ever changing. This understanding can also go the other way. After contemplating external phenomena as impermanent and composed of inert matter, reflect that the body is similar: it is made up of similar elements and has the same transient nature.

Sexual attraction can be a major distraction from meditation as well as from completing worldly activities. When lust disturbs the mind, skillfully contemplate the body that you find so attractive. Examine its parts, its causes, its nature, and its results. Know that one day, if the person lives long, her body will be old. Imagine what the person will look like at age eighty. That body will also one day be a corpse. Such reflections are antidotes to the distorted projection that another person's body is attractive and can bring us pleasure. The purpose of meditating like this is to balance our mind and pacify the discomfort and distraction of lust.

When meditating on the ugliness of another's body, it is important to understand that the person and the body are different. The body may be foul, but the person is a sentient being who wants happiness and seeks freedom from suffering as intensely as we do. The meditation on the unattractive nature of the body is done to free the mind from false projections surrounding the body. But toward the person, cultivate loving-kindness and compassion; that is the appropriate response to a living being.

Nāgārjuna is graphic when he challenges our view of the body as pure and desirable (RA 160–61, 164–65):

> While the nature of this rotting corpse,
>
> with its putrid core covered with skin,
>
> looks extremely terrible,
>
> why [do the lustful] not see it?
>
> [Someone says,] "The skin is not impure;
>
> it is just like a soft cloth."
>
> [Nāgārjuna responds,] Like a leather bag filled with a turd,
>
> how could it be clean?
>
> A pile of excrement is objectionable,
>
> whether it comes from you or someone else.
>
> Why not then object to these filthy bodies,
>
> whether [they are] your own or someone else's?
>
> Your own body is just as filthy
>
> as the body of someone you desire.

So doesn't it make sense to be unattached

to both the external and the internal?

With unwavering honesty, Śāntideva speaks of desire for the bodies of the beloved (BCA 8.41–42):

You engage in fearful deeds for [spouses and lovers],

and would even consume your wealth [for their sake].

But these very bodies of theirs,

which you greatly enjoy in the sexual embrace,

are nothing other than skeletons.

They are not autonomous and are identityless.

Rather than being so desirous and completely obsessed,

why don't you go to the state beyond sorrow (nirvāṇa) instead?

Mindfulness of the Four Elements

The body is composed of the four great elements: earth, water, fire, and air. Each element represents a different property of matter. The earth element represents solidity or mass; it is experienced as hardness. Water is the property of cohesion and functions to bind things together; experientially it is flowing and wet. Fire is heat and is experienced as hot, and air is expansion and is experienced as movement. All material objects are made of a combination of these four elements, and an object's properties are conditioned by them. Where the earth element is weaker, the object is soft; where water is lacking, things do not stay together; where fire is weak, it is cold; and where wind is lacking, things compress or remain stationary.

Mindfulness of the body in terms of the elements that compose it is done in a concise manner as follows (MN 10.12):

> A monastic reviews this same body, however it is placed, however disposed, as consisting of elements thus: "in this body, there are the earth element, the water element, the fire element, and the air element."

A person of sharp faculties contemplates the elements in a concise way. Scanning the body, she examines its parts in terms of their combination of solidity, cohesion, heat, and movement. Focusing on the characteristic of each element, she takes all instances of it together and is mindful of the role and function of that element.

In the expanded meditation on the elements, the parts of the body are identified according to which element is dominant in it, and specific parts that correspond with special elements are pointed out. For example, speaking of the earth element (MN 140:14):

> Whatever internally, belonging to oneself, is solid, solidified, and clung-to, that is head-hair, body-hair, nails, teeth, skin, muscles, tendons, bones, marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, diaphragm, spleen, lungs, large intestine, small intestine, contents of the stomach, feces, or whatever else internally belonging to oneself, is solid, solidified, and clung-to — this is called the internal earth element.

The earth element may be either internal or external. The body parts listed above are associated with the internal earth element. Twelve parts of the body represent the water element: bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, grease, spit, snot, oil of the joints, urine, and whatever else is watery. Whatever is fiery and hot in the body, such as digestion and metabolism, is the fire element, and whatever is like wind, such as the transmission of nerve impulses and the motion of the limbs, is the wind element. The purpose of this meditation is to understand that the body is composed of these four elements.

Another way of doing the meditation in an expanded manner is to scan the body and experience each element. Begin by noticing the quality of solidity and hardness. Then focus on the sensation of cohesion or flowing. Then be mindful of heat and, finally, of the experience of movement, such as the expansion and contraction of the lungs. Following this, focus on the simultaneous presence of the four elements, perceiving them as indivisibly yet distinctly composing the body. No matter how the body is placed or examined, it is made up of a combination of inseparable four elements. By attending to the elements composing the body, the perception of a person is lost and it becomes apparent that the body is nothing more than a collection of the four elements. There is nothing desirable in the body, nothing worth being attached to, nothing to grasp as I or mine (MN 140.14):

> Now both the internal earth element and the external earth element are simply earth element. And that should be seen as it actually is with proper wisdom thus: "This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self." When one sees it thus as it actually is with proper wisdom, one becomes disenchanted with the earth element and makes the mind dispassionate toward the earth element.

The body is not a self. Meditating on this with the power of a concentrated and peaceful mind ushers in a higher level of understanding and knowledge.

The Nine Charnel Ground Contemplations

Although many modern societies try to hide death away and some people see death as a punishment, an indication of failure, or as evil in nature, it is merely a natural occurrence that results from the physical processes of organic matter. In ancient times, death was not hidden in hospitals, old-age homes, or beautifully gardened cemeteries as it is today. Corpses were thrown in charnel grounds where they were left to decompose or be eaten by animals. The Buddha encouraged his disciples to go to charnel grounds to observe corpses in various stages of decomposition. This practice challenges the distorted view of the body as being attractive and a source of pleasure and strengthens renunciation of saṃsāra (MN 10:14–30).

> (1) As though he were to see a corpse thrown aside in a charnel ground, one, two, or three days dead, bloated, livid, and oozing matter, a monastic compares his own body with it thus: "This body too is of the same nature; it will be like that; it is not exempt from that fate" ... (2) As though he were to see a corpse thrown aside in a charnel ground, being devoured by crows, hawks, vultures, dogs, jackals, or various kinds of worms, a monastic compares his own body with it thus: "This body too is of the same nature; it will be like that; it is not exempt from that fate" ... (3) As though he were to see a corpse thrown aside in a charnel ground, a skeleton with flesh and blood, held together with sinews ... (4) a fleshless skeleton smeared with blood, held together with sinews ... (5) a skeleton without flesh and blood, held together with sinews ... (6) disconnected bones scattered in all directions — here a hand-bone, there a foot-bone, here a shin-bone, there a thighbone, here a hip bone, there a backbone, here a rib-bone, there a breastbone, here an arm bone, there a shoulder bone, here a neck bone, there a jaw bone, here a tooth, there the skull ... (7) bones bleached white, the color of shells ... (8) bones heaped up, more than a year old, (9) bones rotted and crumbled to dust, a monastic compares his own body with it thus: "This body too is of the same nature; it will be like that; it is not exempt from that fate"

Nowadays it may be difficult to see a body in these various states of decay, but the phrase "as though" indicates that we could imagine this or view pictures of it — for example, we might see photos of the victims of natural disasters. While the above observations are described as nine separate meditations, in fact they present a sequence of a dead body's process of decay.

After the description of each corpse, the Buddha instructs us to compare our present body with it and to know that our body has the same nature and will become like that corpse under the proper conditions. Our body is not

exempt from death and disintegration. It too will be devoured by animals or worms and become nothing more than a skeleton. That skeleton too breaks apart, disintegrating until only dust remains and the wind blows the dust to the four directions. Seeing that, our identification with this body and our attachment to it vanish. Being attached to this body and clinging to it as I, mine, or my self are senseless.

I (Chodron) saw the photos of the corpses of tsunami victims that were used to help relatives find the bodies of their dear ones. These photos were taken only a couple of days after the tragedy, but already the bodies were rotting. A few of the deceased had their photo IDs on them, but there was no resemblance between the photo and the blackened and bloating corpse. It would have been nearly impossible to identify the body, unless one knew the clothing or jewelry the person had been wearing. It was rather shocking to think that we too could look like that, not to mention that our friends and all the living people walking around, conducting their daily life activities could look like that within a couple of days with no warning at all. But this is reality, and seeing it moves us to be free from cyclic existence and attain liberation.

It is important to understand the purpose of this meditation well and to do it with a balanced mind so that our mind does not proliferate with superstitious or fearful thoughts. Before doing this meditation, it is advisable to have some experience in meditation and to have heard teachings on the four truths.

Mindfulness of Feelings

Through mindfulness of feelings, we enter into the meditation on the second truth, the true origins of duḥkha. The Sanskrit and Pāli word *vedanā*, which is translated as "feelings," does not refer to emotions but to the affective quality of experiences. As such, there are three types of feelings — pleasurable (happy), painful (unhappy, suffering), and neutral. These are expanded to five — pleasant and unpleasant physical feelings, pleasant and unpleasant mental feelings, and neutral feelings. The types of feelings can be expanded further. The sūtra instructs when experiencing a pleasant feeling to understand "I feel a pleasant feeling," and to do similarly when experiencing a painful or a neutral feeling. The sūtra continues, inviting mindfulness of worldly and unworldly (spiritual) pleasant feelings, worldly and unworldly (spiritual) unpleasant feelings, and worldly and unworldly (spiritual) neutral feelings. In each case we are mindful of what type of feeling we are experiencing (MN 10.32).

To establish mindfulness of feelings, first observe your mental and physical sensations. Second, identify pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral feelings

without conceptualizing about the feeling or its source. What feeling do you experience when the sun's rays touch your skin? When you are hungry? After someone points out a mistake you made?

The second step involves discerning worldly and unworldly feelings. Pleasant, painful, and neutral feelings each have two types: worldly and unworldly or spiritual. *Worldly feelings* arise from contact with sense objects; *spiritual feelings* arise from aligning our minds with the Dharma. Feelings arising in meditative absorption are also spiritual feelings. They are unworldly in comparison to feelings in the desire realm, even though they are not the feelings of liberated beings.

Worldly painful feelings are triggered by contact with undesirable sense objects or from not acquiring the desirable ones we seek. *Spiritual painful feelings* include the sadness that may arise when we aspire for realizations but have not yet actualized them. They may also arise from regretting harmful actions we have done. This spiritual pain motivates us to engage in virtuous actions, purification practice, and meditation to actualize our spiritual goals.

Worldly neutral feelings arise in us ordinary beings who are oblivious to the results of our actions and are unaware of danger. They leave us apathetic, complacent, and lazy. *Spiritual neutral feelings* are feelings of equanimity, such as the equanimity of the fourth dhyāna.

Worldly pleasant feelings are experienced from contact with attractive sense objects such as good food, music, and so on. *Spiritual pleasant feelings* are, for example, the peace that comes from releasing anger and the joy arising from the aspiration for liberation and bodhicitta.

Observe that you can experience a pleasant feeling one moment and a painful one the next. Feelings arise and cease quickly, one after the other. Contemplating the ceasing of pleasant feelings especially makes obvious their unsatisfactory nature.

After some time, cease focusing on feelings as being pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral and cease observing their arising and passing away. Be mindful simply that there is feeling. Experience feelings as impersonal phenomena. Do not identify with them and do not grasp them as I or mine. In this way, abide peacefully.

Arhats do not experience worldly happy feelings, but may experience the spiritual happiness of the first three dhyānas. They do not experience worldly neutral feelings, but have spiritual neutral feelings, such as the equanimity of the fourth dhyāna. According to Pāli texts, arhats may experience painful physical feelings, but not painful mental feelings. They also say that the Buddha experienced physical pain after stepping on a thorn. When arhats feel

empathy and compassion for others, there is no sorrow in their minds because sorrow arises only when there is grasping to self.

According to the Sanskrit tradition, ārya bodhisattvas experience neither physical nor mental pain. The former is due to their merit, the latter a result of their wisdom.

In addition, investigate if there is an independent self who experiences a feeling. When feeling happy, investigate, Who is experiencing this feeling? These contemplations lead to relinquishing grasping at feelings.

While most ascetics at the time of the Buddha thought that pleasant feelings were to be avoided and spiritual progress could be developed through experiencing pain, the Buddha did not hold this view. He differentiated worldly and spiritual feelings and taught that if worldly feelings are not observed with mindfulness, they are the source of afflictions and karma. Contrariwise, spiritual pleasant, unpleasant, and equanimous feelings are beneficial and can lead us to further our practice of virtue.

The sūtra then instructs us to contemplate feelings internally, externally, and both. Contemplating them internally was explained above. Contemplating them externally opens our mind to the fact that others also experience pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral feelings. With mindfulness knowing our own feelings, we can sense others' feelings. Scientists speak of mirror neurons that evoke in us a feeling similar to what is experienced by others that we see or hear about. This arouses compassion in us because we are aware that like us, others' afflictions arise immediately in response to their feelings. Like us, others are captivated by their feelings and go to all lengths to avoid unpleasant ones, experience pleasant ones, and not lose neutral ones.

Mindfulness of feelings internally and externally involves alternating contemplation of our own feelings and others' feelings. This, too, will rouse our compassion.

Causes and Results of Feelings

In mindfulness of feelings observe and examine the causes and results of feelings. Through this, understand that feelings are impermanent and in the nature of duḥkha. Feelings change at any slight condition: the warm sun brings a pleasant feeling and a moment later the wind brings an unpleasant one. Feelings are unstable and continuously change. Because they are so transient, there is no sense in being attached to pleasant feelings or upset by unpleasant ones. When we are not so reactive to our feelings, the mind becomes calmer.

The *cause* of feelings is contact with objects. The object (tasty pizza), sense faculty (tongue faculty), and preceding moment of consciousness come

together to produce contact. Due to this contact a gustatory consciousness with a pleasant physical feeling arises. Karma is also a cause of feelings: the pleasant, painful, and neutral feelings we experience are the results of our previous actions. Recalling this prevents us from blaming others for our suffering and believing external objects and other people are the primary causes of our happiness and pain.

There is a close connection between physical and mental feelings. When our body is in pain, the mind usually is unhappy. When the mind is happy, we don't dwell on painful physical sensations, whereas when the mind is unhappy, the body experiences more pain. To add to this, our preconceptions affect mental feelings. Anxious thoughts spinning in our mind cause unpleasant feelings. Rejoicing in a friend's good fortune brings happiness in the mind.

The *results* of feelings are craving and clinging, as expressed in the twelve links of dependent origination, where seventh-link feeling gives rise to eighth-link craving and ninth-link clinging.[116] As long as we experience these polluted feelings, craving to experience pleasant feelings, craving not to be separated from pleasant or neutral feelings, and craving not to experience unpleasant feelings will dominate our lives. Pleasant feelings give rise to attachment; we don't want to be separated from either the pleasant feeling or the object that triggered it. Painful feelings provoke animosity that wants that painful feeling to end and seeks to harm the object that triggered it. Neutral feelings slide into apathy and confusion. Motivated by the three poisons of attachment, animosity, and confusion, we create karma that produces continuous rebirth in cyclic existence. This is how mindfulness of feelings makes us aware of the true origins of duḥkha.

Here the conditioned nature of our experiences becomes obvious. Feelings arise and the mind immediately and habitually reacts to them. We crave pleasant feelings and will go to great lengths to have them, even if we suffer afterward. We loathe painful feelings and do everything we can to avoid them, even if that leads us to harming ourselves and our dear ones in the long term. We remain in apathetic confusion as a result of neutral feelings. In short, pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral feelings control us and affect every aspect of our life.

Awareness of this evolutionary process of feelings leading to afflictions, which motivate karma that causes rebirth, makes us pause when feelings arise so that they don't act as a catalyst for afflictive emotional responses and for the creation of destructive karma.

The three types of feelings are related to the three types of duḥkha: Painful feelings are the duḥkha of pain, pleasant feelings are the duḥkha of change, and neutral feelings are the pervasive duḥkha of conditioning. There's

no need to explain the undesirability of painful feelings. But pleasant feelings too are unsatisfactory because they do not last, and with uninterrupted contact the object that brought pleasure in time brings pain. We can see this in our lives. Because neutral feelings are polluted by ignorance, they contain the seed for outright suffering; the suffering of pain is always ready to flare up. By observing the unstable nature of neutral feelings, we see they are not trustworthy. In this way, too, polluted feelings are the cause of duḥkha.

To cultivate mindfulness of feelings, we observe our past, present, and future feelings, observing and examining what we feel now, what we felt in the past, and what we anticipate feeling in the future. What causes these feelings? What are their characteristics? What results do they bring? Nāgārjuna's perspectives on feelings makes clear their cause, nature, and result (RA 346–48, 353):

> Even after a wheel-turning monarch attains
>
> [governance over] the whole world with its four continents,
>
> pleasure for him is still considered
>
> to be only twofold: physical and mental.
>
> A pleasurable physical sensation
>
> is just comparatively less pain.
>
> Mental pleasure — by nature an attitude —
>
> is just conceptually created.
>
> Since it is just comparatively less pain
>
> or merely conceptually created,
>
> all the pleasure in the world
>
> is ultimately not really [pleasure].
>
> The mind apprehends an image of a past object,
>
> which has been apprehended by the senses
>
> and conceptualizes
>
> and believes it to be pleasurable.

Feelings Cause Craving and Clinging

As explained in the twelve links of dependent origination, feelings give rise to craving and clinging, which are types of attachment. The four types of clinging make clear how feelings keep us bound in saṃsāra.

1. *Clinging to desirable objects* derives from experiencing a pleasant feeling. Wanting the pleasant feeling to continue, we cling to the object or person that appears to cause it.

2. *Clinging to a view* refers to holding all other wrong philosophical views, except the view of a personal identity, which is the fourth clinging. Clinging arises from the feeling of satisfaction derived from holding a wrong view. Holding that past and future lives and the law of karma and its results are nonexistent is clinging to a nihilistic view. Believing there is an unchanging soul or that the universe was created by a supreme being is clinging to an absolutist view. These views are a source of satisfaction to the people who hold them. Craving the pleasant feeling of this satisfaction, they cling to a wrong view, believing it to be correct.

Now we must ask: Is it possible to be attached to or cling to the right view? For example, Nāgārjuna's view of emptiness gives me a feeling of inner satisfaction and tranquility. Does that mean I am attached to those pleasant feelings and because of that cling to Nāgārjuna's view, which is their source? Similarly, remembering that I am a monk, I feel inner satisfaction. Am I attached to that feeling such that I cling to being a monk and to my bhikṣu robes? In short, is this a form of clinging to the view? Does attachment to the view depend on that view being distorted or correct?

I believe there is a difference. My being a monk and Nāgārjuna's view themselves are antidotes to attachment, so deriving a sense of satisfaction from them is not an impediment to my awakening. Nevertheless, if I cling to Nāgārjuna's view or to being a monk, that is due to my lack of practice. This occurs when our experience in the Dharma is new and immature, but as we mature in the Dharma it subsides.

Wrong views nourish afflictions and destructive behavior. By becoming habituated with such views over time, there is no possibility to overcome attachment. Wrong views will never become antidotes to attachment or ignorance. Correct views, on the other hand, are opposed to attachment and to unethical behavior. By becoming familiar with them, they become the antidote to afflictions. There is a big difference between being drawn to wrong views and being attracted to correct ones.

This does not mean that clinging to correct views is beneficial or that we should cultivate this clinging. While cultivating correct views benefits us, attachment to them is not part of the path to awakening. Still, holding correct views is not included in the category of "clinging to the view."

3. *Clinging to rules and practices* arises from clinging to wrong views as people develop ideas of ethical conduct that conform to these wrong views. By acting unethically, they create destructive karma. People may wear strange

clothes or adopt peculiar kinds of behavior, believing them to be correct spiritual practice.

For example, some undisciplined spiritual masters are attached to pleasurable feeling. Based on that attachment, they desire the source of the feeling: sexual contact, money, or power (clinging to desirable objects). They adopt a certain philosophy or view to justify their desire — for example, thinking that people with realizations are beyond cause and effect (clinging to the view). They become proud due to a mistaken notion of their own accomplishments (clinging to the self). As a result, they conduct themselves in unusual ways or engage in behaviors that lead to scandals (clinging to rules and practices).

But we should not just look at others' views and behavior. It is more important that we examine our own and see how feelings, craving, and the four types of clinging function in us. As long as these are present in our mind, we will create new karma for more rebirths. Mindfulness of feelings can help us mollify these true origins of suffering.

4. *Clinging to a view of self* is discussed separately from clinging to the other wrong views because this view is the root of saṃsāra. The previous three clingings are derived from clinging to the self, the wrong view of a personal identity (*satkāyadṛṣṭi*, *sakkāyadiṭṭhi*). There is a strong conceit of selfhood that grasps the I as real.

Mindfulness of Feeling as an Antidote to Pain

Mindfulness of feelings can be used as an antidote when we are distracted by physical pain while meditating. Without applying mindfulness to the pain, it easily becomes a source of anger or discouragement, while responding with mindfulness transforms the experience. For example, your leg hurts while practicing mindfulness of breathing. First note the painful feeling and return to the breath. If it persists and becomes a strong distraction, leave the breath as your meditation object and turn mindfulness to the pain. By paying close attention to the pain and investigating its nature, see that it isn't one solid entity. It is a flowing process and a series of moments of pain. Each moment of pain differs slightly from the preceding and the following moments. Soon what used to appear to be an unchanging, monolithic, painful feeling is seen as a mental construct projected on a series of moments that have a similar quality. Notice the changing moments of pain as well as the different kinds of pain — throbbing, prickling, stabbing, aching, chronic, acute, and so on. Focusing mindfulness on the painful feeling and examining it with curiosity lessens the mental unhappiness and the craving to be free from it. Then return to your original meditation object, breathing.

Many doctors have found that mindfulness meditation is a great aid for people who suffer from chronic pain and can be employed regardless of a person's spiritual beliefs.

Similarly, a happy feeling that arises in meditation can be taken as the object of the mindfulness of feelings. If the happiness goes unexamined, we run the risk of becoming attached and clinging to it, wanting to re-create it, and longing for it to occur again. Such craving becomes a major source of distraction in meditation.

Usually we do not examine our feelings and react strongly to pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral feelings. Sometimes we are even unaware of what we are feeling or are unable to distinguish between physical and mental feelings. For example, when ill, we experience physical discomfort. Because we don't like this, mental unhappiness arises. This gives rise to craving for comfort and anger at the pain and at the illness that causes the pain. Motivated by anger, we scold the very people who are trying to take care of us. Unaware of the unfolding process of feelings, emotions, and actions, we are miserable and feel sorry for ourselves.

Mindfulness of feelings can help us unravel this by enabling us to distinguish physical pain from mental unhappiness. We notice that mental unhappiness provokes anger much more than physical pain does. Mindfulness allows us to stay with simply the physical feeling of pain and stops it from provoking mental unhappiness that brings a proliferation of anxious thoughts, which in turn lead to more suffering.

Some people have more physical suffering; others have more mental suffering. The latter group easily becomes entangled with mental feelings and emotional responses to those feelings. We often believe that when painful mental feelings arise, we have no choice about how to respond to them. When there is mental unhappiness, we grasp it as permanent and real. We don't think of it as existing simply because causes produced it, but believe it has an inherent, unchanging nature. As a result, we become even more anxious, fearing the pain will never end.

The mind has an amazing ability to make up stories — what practitioners often call proliferations (*prapañca*, *papañca*, T. *spros pa*). We may experience a simple sense contact — someone says a few words to us — and the mind proliferates with ideas, preconceptions, and opinions. Our imagination projects motivations onto the other person and creates a variety of scenes leading to mental happiness or unhappiness. We interpret the words as praise and feel elated, or we cynically interpret them as blame and either think we are worthless or get angry at the other person. Mindfulness enables us to analyze this process and cease the unrealistic proliferations. Śāntideva explains (BCA 6.7–9):

Having found its fuel of mental unhappiness
when we are prevented from obtaining what we wish for
and when we meet with what we do not want,
anger increases and then destroys me.
Therefore I will totally eradicate
the fuel of this enemy,
for this enemy has no other function
than that of causing me harm.
Whatever befalls me,
I will not [allow it to] disturb my mental joy.
For having been made unhappy, I shall not accomplish what I wish,
and my virtues will decline.

Developing introspective awareness and mindful observation of feelings creates space in our minds to consider our response to feelings and halt the automatic arising of anger or attachment. We can then respond to situations with a balanced mind. Śāntideva then advises (BCA 6.10):

Why be unhappy about something
if it can be remedied?
And what is the use of being unhappy about something
if it cannot be remedied?

Practicing this advice obliterates the mental suffering that arises from distorted conceptualizations. If we can remedy a situation, there's no sense in being unhappy. We should do what we can to change it. If we cannot change it, being unhappy is useless. It's better to accept the situation, relax, and turn our attention to something more productive.

The *Ārya Ratnacūḍa Sūtra* describes how bodhisattvas establish mindfulness on feelings (ŚS 6):

> Whenever they experience pleasant feelings, they realize great compassion for all sentient beings who indulge in attachment, and they completely abandon all of their own propensities for attachment. Whenever they experience painful feelings, they realize great compassion for all sentient beings who indulge in animosity, and they completely abandon all of their own propensities for animosity. Whenever they experience neutral feelings, they realize great compassion for all sentient beings

> who indulge in confusion, and they completely abandon all of their own propensities for confusion ... Whatever feelings they experience, they know them all to be impermanent and experience them as such. They recognize and experience them as unsatisfactory. They recognize and experience them as identityless.

Mindfulness of the Mind

The *Sūtra on the Ten Grounds* advises a bodhisattva who has mindfulness and introspective awareness and who has eliminated covetousness and displeasure in regard to the world to contemplate the mind with regard to the inner mind, the outer mind, and both the inner and outer minds, and to abide without clinging. There is much to contemplate here that is preparation for the more advanced practices of Dzogchen and Mahāmudrā.

In modern science, external objects form the field of inquiry. In Buddhist science, the inner world — the mind itself — is the main field of investigation. When observing the mind, it could be that one part of the mind is the object — the field of analysis — and another part acts as the observer observing that mind. Alternatively, one moment of mind could observe the previous moment of mind.

Mindfulness of the Impermanence of the Mind

Mindfulness of the mind helps to overcome the distortion of believing what is impermanent to be permanent. The mind of the past is now gone, the mind of the future has yet to come. There is only the present mind, but this too is ever-changing and does not remain in the next nanosecond. Each moment of mind arises, abides, and disintegrates simultaneously. We often hear the advice to "stay in the present moment," but when is the present moment? No sooner has it arisen than it has ceased. If we try to isolate and examine one moment, we find it has a beginning, middle, and end. Which is the present part of that moment? When does the mind abide? If we say the middle part, we face the same quandary because it too has a beginning, middle, and final portion.

Mindfulness of this subtle impermanent nature of the mind reduces the fear of death. While actively dying, people often feel that they are becoming nonexistent and tremendous fear arises. This fear is based on self-grasping ignorance and feeds craving and clinging, which ripen the karmic seeds that propel another birth in saṃsāra. Relaxing that fear gives us more opportunity to meditate and possibly gain deep realizations at the time of death. Understanding two points diminishes the fear of the self vanishing at death:

(1) although a moment of mind does not remain in the next moment, the continuity of moments of mind is indestructible, and (2) the I is designated in dependence on the mind. By maintaining mindfulness on the mind, we will be able to perceive directly its subtle changing nature and understand that even though the mind is transient, its continuity continues.

Mindfulness of the Conventional Nature of the Mind

Another meditation on the mindfulness of the mind is to question what is mind. We can easily repeat the definition of mind: that which is clear and cognizant, but that isn't sufficient. We should be able to understand the meaning — to identify our mind and know its nature. We experience the mind, but a precise understanding of it is difficult to come by. The mind knows, is aware, and experiences objects. It is formless and clear light. Like a mirror, it reflects objects, but we cannot precisely identify it.

In our daily life, we place too much emphasis on the experiences of our five sensory consciousnesses. Even the experiences of our mental consciousness usually concern the objects our five sensory consciousnesses perceive. We think about what we saw and what someone said to us. We imagine going to a beautiful beach and eating delicious food. Apart from these outward-directed mental consciousnesses, our inwardly directed mental consciousnesses usually relate to internal feelings of happiness and suffering, which are usually derived from contact with sensory objects. In this way, our whole lives are controlled by sensory experiences and we do not experience the real nature of mind.

To do so, when meditating we must overcome the distractions associated with our visual consciousness. When we close our eyes, we often see a reddish color. Other times our mental consciousness becomes heavy. Thus when meditating it is better to keep the eyes slightly open, focusing them loosely on an area that is bland, not one that is colorful. In this way, eventually we learn to ignore our visual consciousness.

To allow the actual conventional nature of the mind to arise, we must stop thinking about external events and internal objects and experiences. All thoughts of the past and future — dreaming of past experiences and planning future ones — must cease. Initially we may feel the mind is nothing, void, thoughtless. When we are able to prolong this time of not remembering the past or thinking about the future, we might get a glimpse of voidness; there is a gap in which the arising of mental elaborations and manifestations of the coarser level of mind have stopped. An experience of stillness arises because the senses are not active and there is just the experience of the present, of a void. This void is not the emptiness of inherent existence; it is an openness. When this gap is sustained, we may get a glimpse of the mere clear and

cognizant nature of mind. Only then have we found for the first time the object of meditation for practicing mindfulness of the mind. Become familiar with this experience. As you do, you will experience the momentary impermanence of the mind.

As meditation continues, we become aware of two things. First, the natural state of the mind is free from both destructive emotions such as animosity and constructive emotions such as compassion. All our emotions are not the very nature of the mind. Emotions arise due to causes and conditions, but they do not exist in the very nature of the mind. Through experiencing this, we see that the very nature of the mind is neutral. Although it can be influenced by constructive and destructive emotions, these emotions are adventitious and temporary. Seeing this neutral nature of the mind, we understand it is possible to put an end to mental defilements.

Second, the mind is momentary and fluctuating. Thus whatever thoughts accompany the mind are also momentary. They do not last a second moment. From this point of view, we can understand that it is possible to abandon mental defilements. This leads to a discussion of emptiness and selflessness, which will come later.

In summary, through these two insights — that emotions are not in the very nature of the mind and that thoughts are transient — we see the possibility of eliminating mental defilements and know that attaining true cessations is possible. This is how mindfulness of the mind leads to understanding true cessations, the third truth.

Mindfulness of the Emptiness of the I

When we try to focus mindfulness on the present moment of mind, we cannot find it. In any moment of mind, half of it is already past and half is yet to come. The present cannot be pinpointed; the mind is unfindable when sought with ultimate analysis. Nāgārjuna describes this in "Examination of Coming and Going," the second chapter of his *Treatise on the Middle Way*.

In another way, mindfulness of the mind helps us to realize the selflessness of persons. We usually think of the person as related to or identified with the psychophysical aggregates, the body and mind. We say, "I am Tibetan," or "you are Western," in dependence on the body. We say, "I'm Buddhist," or "you are socialist," in relation to the mind. Sometimes we feel that the I exists as the body, and other times we feel that the I exists as the mind.

In the four establishments of mindfulness, we first meditate with mindfulness on the body, carefully reflecting on the characteristics of the body. Then we meditate with mindfulness on the mind, seeing the mind as

momentary and transient. On this basis we can gain an understanding of the selflessness of the person.

When investigating the nature of the body, it feels like there is a solid I that is investigating the body. "I am meditating on the mindfulness of the body." Although the I appears to be inside the body, it also seems to be separate from the body. When meditating with mindfulness of feelings, it feels like there is a findable I who experiences pain and pleasure. This I too seems to be separate from the feelings it experiences; it is the experiencer or owner of the feelings.

When meditating with mindfulness on the mind, it initially feels that our mind could be I, me, my self. But later on we discover a subtler neutral mind that becomes the object to investigate through mindfulness. Here mind is the object of meditation, and that mind is now within the focus of mindfulness. At that time we may wonder, "Where is the I now? Who is practicing mindfulness of the mind?" We may have the feeling that the I is merely designated on the basis of the collection of mind and body. There is no independent I that is the owner of the body and the mind. There is no inherently existent I that is meditating. In this way, mindfulness of the mind leads to understanding the selflessness of persons, and for this reason as well, it enables us to understand true cessations.

Let's explore the question, "Am I my mind?" in more depth. Within Buddhist philosophy, there are two viewpoints. One states that the mind is the final illustration of the I. The other refutes that the mind is an illustration of the person. The latter point of view asserts that the mind cannot be the I because if it were, the appropriated and the appropriator would be the same. The "appropriated" refers to what is used, in this case the aggregates of body and mind. The "appropriator" refers to what uses or owns them, the I. This terminology is tricky, for we may easily think that there must be an independent I that uses, owns, or appropriates the aggregates. However, this is not the case. When we say, "I have a body," is the I (the appropriator) identical to the body (the appropriated)? If it were, then the person and the body would be exactly the same and saying, "I have a body" would be equivalent to saying, "I am a body." In that case, everything the person did, the body would also do, so "I'm thinking" would mean "the body is thinking." However, the body itself doesn't think; it is the mind that thinks.

Even the subtlest form of mind — the fundamental innate clear light mind that arises at the time of death — is not the person. If we posited this clear light mind as the I, we could not say, "I experience the clear light mind," because the person would be the clear light mind. This subtlest mind, the continuity of which leaves one body and goes to the next rebirth, is "owned" by the I — it is my mind. Thus the person and the mind are not the same.

The question remains: What is the I? We are not searching for the conventional, ordinary, nominal self but are trying to pinpoint exactly what is the inherent referent of the term "I." The aggregates are the basis of designation of the person, and the person or I is the designated object. When we search to find out exactly what the I is, to isolate and identify it as an objective entity with its own independent nature, what do we find? After we have investigated everything — the body, feelings, discriminations, miscellaneous factors, consciousness, the collection of these aggregates, something different from the aggregates — we still cannot find an independent person or I. When we search for who the Buddha is, we can't find an inherently existent Buddha. At this point, we discover only the lack of an independent person. The term "I" exists and the designated object I exists because we say, "I'm walking" and "I'm meditating." Yet when we examine exactly what this I truly is, we cannot find it. None of the aggregates is the person. It is in this context that the Buddha said in the Perfection of Wisdom sūtras that all phenomena are merely designated in dependence on their basis of designation — their parts or attributes. Everything exists by name only. Nothing can be found when searched for with ultimate analysis. In this way, mindfulness of the mind prompts us to investigate the ultimate nature of the I and leads us to understand the emptiness of inherent existence of the mind.

Mindfulness of the mind's impermanent nature also fosters understanding the selflessness of phenomena. In the *Commentary on Bodhicitta*, Nāgārjuna says (vv. 53–54):

> To whom consciousness is momentary,
>
> to them it cannot be permanent.
>
> So if the mind is impermanent,
>
> how could it be inconsistent with emptiness?
>
> In brief, if the buddhas uphold
>
> the mind to be impermanent,
>
> how would they not uphold
>
> that it is empty as well?

Since the mind arises and passes away in each moment, it is impermanent. If the mind were not empty of inherent existence — that is, if it existed inherently — it would have to be permanent. Why? Because inherent existence means existence without depending on any other factors. If the mind inherently existed, it would be unrelated to causes and conditions and would therefore be permanent. Since that cannot be, the mind must be empty of inherent existence.

As we meditate on the above three establishments of mindfulness, we go from the coarse to the subtle. The body is a coarse object of contemplation. Our internal feelings of pain and pleasure are subtler. The neutral nature of the mind, without feelings of pain and pleasure, is even subtler.

Mindfulness of Mental States

In the Pāli tradition, mindfulness of the mind refers to mindfulness of mental states. These mental states are a primary consciousness colored by the mental factors that accompany it. Just as water mixed with orange syrup becomes an orange drink, the mind accompanied by anger is identified as an angry mind and a mind accompanied by concentration is a concentrated mind.

In the *Establishment of Mindfulness Sūtra*, the Buddha pointed out sixteen types (eight pairs) of mental states as objects of mindfulness, although mindfulness of the mind is not limited to these. Three of the pairs involve discerning virtuous and nonvirtuous mental states. The form for these is, how does a monastic abide contemplating mind as mind? Here a monastic understands (1) a mind affected by attachment as mind affected by attachment, (2) a mind unaffected by attachment as a mind unaffected by attachment, and so on, the others being a mind (3) affected by animosity, (4) unaffected by animosity, (5) affected by confusion, and (6) unaffected by confusion. These three pairs involve the presence or absence of the three poisons.

The next pair is nonvirtuous: (7) a constricted (tight) mind and (8) a distracted (restless) mind. The following four pairs are the presence or absence of superior mental states, discerning (9) an exalted mind, (10) an unexalted mind, (11) a surpassed mind, (12) an unsurpassed mind, (13) a concentrated mind, (14) an unconcentrated mind, (15) a liberated mind, and (16) an unliberated mind. The terms "exalted," "unsurpassable," "concentrated," and "liberated" have similar meanings and principally refer to a mind that has attained dhyāna, in contrast to an unexalted, surpassable, unconcentrated, or unliberated mind that has not. Here "liberated" does not refer to nirvāṇa, because mindfulness of the mind is a practice that is aimed at liberation and thus precedes it.

Being aware of our mental and emotional patterns is essential. The more we think a certain thought or have a particular emotion — either a constructive or destructive one — the more it becomes entrenched in our mind. As the Buddha reminds us (MN 19.6), "Whatever a monastic frequently thinks and ponders upon, that will become the inclination of his mind."

By allowing our thoughts to run here and there, we build up habits of attachment, arrogance, envy, resentment, and so on that are reinforced to the point that they become part of what is called our "character." These mental habits can carry into future lives as well. Therefore it is wise to observe our thoughts and emotions and ask ourselves, "Is this a quality I want to enhance in myself? I'm creating the future me right now. What kind of person do I want to become?" Adopting this broader perspective exposes the danger in letting negative emotions ruminate unabated and the benefits of consciously encouraging and enhancing positive thoughts and emotions.

After observing the characteristics of these and other mental states so that you can easily identify them, progress to the contemplations described in the refrain in the sūtra, which is the insight portion of mindfulness of the mind. Here, contemplating the mind as mind internally refers to observing your own mental states. For ordinary beings without supernormal powers, contemplating the mind externally is awareness that just as these mental states arise in you, so too do they arise in others. Then alternate contemplating the mental states of yourself and those of others.

Also included in the insight aspect of mindfulness of the mind is contemplating the arising of the mind — various mental states arise due to their unique conditions — and the vanishing of the mind — these mental states do not last in the next moment and pass away as soon as they arise. Then contemplate both their arising and passing away — the momentary nature of all mental states. If a strong emotion interrupts your meditation, temporarily set aside contemplating the arising and ceasing of mental states in general and turn mindfulness to that particular mental state so that you can identify its characteristics. Then once the mind becomes more balanced, return your focus to the arising and ceasing of mental states in general.

After familiarity with the various characteristics of differing mental states is established and you can identify them quickly and easily, observe the mental process itself with mindfulness, and through this abide without clinging.

Mindfulness of the mind develops naturally from mindfulness of feeling because based on the three types of feelings, the three poisonous mental states arise. Mindfulness of the mind protects the mind from automatically generating afflictions in response to worldly feelings.

As with mindfulness of feelings, mindfulness of mind can be done as either a temporary practice or as the main practice. When our primary meditation object is not the mind — when it is breathing, feelings, and so on — then we are mindful of the mind in order to prevent nonvirtuous mental states from taking over or becoming habitual. When mindfulness of the mind is the main practice, we may begin the meditation session by observing the breath to settle the mind and then turn our mindfulness to the mind itself,

observing whatever mental state is present without clinging to it or pushing it away.

13 | The Four Establishments of Mindfulness: Phenomena

Mindfulness of Phenomena

THE *Sūtra on the Ten Grounds* advises bodhisattvas who have mindfulness and introspective awareness, and who have eliminated longing and displeasure for the world, to contemplate phenomena (*dharma*) with regard to the inner phenomena, outer phenomena, and both the inner and outer phenomena, and to abide without clinging.

In *Golden Rosary* (*Legs bshad gser phreng*), Tsongkhapa states that the principal phenomena to be contemplated are the factors to adopt and to abandon on the path. Here dharma refers to both the pure class of phenomena — beneficial mental states to cultivate — and the impure class — afflictions to abandon. By reflecting on these mental factors, we enter the practice of the fourth truth, the true path.

Here too we apply mindfulness and identify the afflictive mental factors in our own mind — their causes, characteristics, and results. The afflictive mental factors disturb the mind, making it unclear and unmanageable, whereas the purified mental factors affect the main mind positively, making it clear, manageable, and tranquil. Observe this in your own experience both when you meditate and in daily life.

Also observe that the afflictive mental factors lack a valid basis and thus are easily uprooted by wisdom. Lacking anything true to support them, they rest entirely on misconception. The positive mental factors, however, have the force of reasoning as their backing, and therefore can uproot the afflictive factors. Moreover, positive emotions and correct views can be increased limitlessly.

Mindfulness of phenomena leads to practicing the true path, the essence of which is the realization of selflessness and emptiness. We have already seen that the self is not the body, feelings, or mind. Now examining all other phenomena — especially the mental factors — we

are still unable to pinpoint an inherently existent self and can with certainty conclude that the self is empty of inherent existence. But the self being empty does not mean it is nonexistent. Instead, because it lacks inherent or independent existence, it must exist dependently — dependent on its causes, parts, and on being merely designated by the mind. This merely designated, conventional I is the person that cycles in saṃsāra and attains nirvāṇa. In short, the I being empty of inherent existence and existing by the force of being designated in dependence on the aggregates are not contradictory. This realization is the ultimate true path that leads to true cessation.

The Pāli sūtra prescribes five sets of phenomena to examine in mindfulness of phenomena: the five hindrances, five aggregates, twelve sources, seven awakening factors, and four truths.[117] Contemplating them will lead us to the realization of the ultimate Dharma, true cessations. The practice of mindfulness of phenomena is not about contemplating categories of items. Rather, these schemas are used to elucidate and make our experience intelligible. They serve as maps and guidebooks that lead us through the complexities of our experiences to reach liberation.

The sequence of the five sets is itself a map. Mindfulness of the five hindrances comes first because they are the major impediment to development of the mind, specifically to cultivating serenity and insight. Overcoming them is an essential first step, which enables us to explore the field of our experience using the framework of the five aggregates and twelve sources. As insight develops, the seven awakening factors become prominent, and as they mature, penetrative understanding of the four truths becomes clear and strong. This results in understanding the ultimate truth of the Dharma.

Most of the practices in the four establishments of mindfulness are related to insight meditation, either as preparatory practices or as actual insight meditations. Although mindfulness of body, feelings, and mind can be used to generate insight, they are also helpful preliminaries for the mindfulness of phenomena because developing mindfulness and concentration on these three is easier and sets the stage for the analysis done during mindfulness of phenomena. The practice of insight becomes central in the mindfulness of phenomena.

The four establishments of mindfulness are not mutually exclusive practices. For example, if mindfulness of breathing is your primary

practice, but a strong feeling arises during your meditation session, you can temporarily contemplate it until it subsides and then return to contemplation of breathing. A similar diversion can be done to pacify a strong affliction that has arisen. Naturally as mindfulness of breathing continues, the five hindrances will arise and mindfulness of phenomena is used to deal with them skillfully. As the practice continues, the seven awakening factors and so forth will also be encountered.

We can begin practicing the four establishments of mindfulness without serenity. In fact, these practices can lead to access concentration, especially when the object of mindfulness is one that easily leads to concentration, such as mindfulness of breathing and mindfulness of the parts of the body. Concentration when meditating on mindfulness of feelings and mindfulness of mental states does not focus long enough on only one object to lead to access concentration. In these two practices we observe whatever feeling or mental state arises at the moment and do not focus on one constant object. However, mindfulness of feelings and of mind does lead to a kind of samādhi in which the mind is stabilized steadfastly although the object of mind constantly changes. Because the mind is stable and steady, the concentration is sufficient for insight knowledge to arise.

Some of the five sets of phenomena have been explained earlier in the *Library of Wisdom and Compassion* series. You may want to review them. The following explanation accords with the Pāli tradition in terms of the description of the path and when certain events occur. Other than that, the explanation accords with the Sanskrit tradition.

Mindfulness of the Five Hindrances

The five hindrances — sensual desire, malice, lethargy and sleepiness, restlessness and regret, and doubt were explained in the higher training in concentration in chapter 7. Here they are considered as objects of the mindfulness of phenomena. The *Establishments of Mindfulness Sūtra* gives a four-step process to abide contemplating phenomena as phenomena in terms of the five hindrances. Using the example of *sensual desire*:[118]

1. *Understand when sensual desire is present in you and when it is absent*. When we do not know that a hindrance has arisen, we will be unaware of its effects on our thoughts, mood, speech, and actions. To counteract this, when a hindrance interrupts meditation, note its presence, release it, and return your focus to the primary meditation object. If the hindrance persists, temporarily switch mindfulness from your meditation object to observe the hindrance, making it the meditation object. Observe how it affects the feelings in the body and mind. Watch it arise and subside; note if it is constant or if it fluctuates in intensity. Observing a hindrance in this way weakens its strength. After the hindrance ceases, observe the change in your feelings and mood.

2. *Understand the causes for sensual desire to arise*. Sensual desire arises as a result of contact with an attractive object — a person, place, possession, and so forth. From this arises distorted attention, which projects or exaggerates its desirable qualities. This triggers sensual desire, and attachment for it arises.

Attachment also arises from not guarding our senses — gazing at attractive people, looking in store windows, reading advertisements. Socializing with people who talk about desirable objects and people also triggers desire.

3. *Understand how to temporarily suppress manifest sensual desire.* If sensual desire — in particular sexual desire — persists, contemplate its antidote, the thirty-two parts of the body and so forth. For attachment to possessions, think of their impermanence and the problems that arise from protecting possessions; consider the disappointment you experience when they break or become outdated. Contemplate the disadvantages of attachment itself. Desire is like a debt collector who follows us around saying, "Give me this, give me that." We can't freely move because the debt collector trails us everywhere, breathing down our neck and not letting us rest peacefully.

4. *Understand how to eliminate sensual desire completely*. Sensual desire is abandoned upon becoming a nonreturner. The commentary to the Pāli sūtra says it is totally eliminated at arhatship. This is because the commentary has a broader definition of sensual desire, seeing it as any craving whatsoever, not just attachment to sensual

objects. According to the Sanskrit tradition, all hindrances are completely eradicated at arhatship.

Since mindfulness is applied to all five hindrances using these four steps, the remaining four hindrances will be touched on only briefly.

Malice arises when distorted attention projects or exaggerates the unattractive qualities of a person or object. As with the other hindrances, noting it, letting it go, and returning to the meditation object is the first antidote to apply. If it persists, make it the object of mindfulness, observing how it affects the mind. Malice and resentment come from within us; others are only the canvas on which we paint our disparaging projections.

The direct antidote to malice is loving-kindness. Daily meditation on loving-kindness is an effective way to gradually chip away at the judgmental, angry mind. When our irritation is directed toward an inanimate thing — for example, a device that malfunctions — reflect that the object is simply a combination of elements that arose due to causes and conditions.

Good friends, suitable conversations, and guarding the sense doors help to prevent malice, which is likened to a person with a severe illness: everything that person is given is pushed away and he finds nothing agreeable anywhere. Malice is abandoned upon becoming a nonreturner, according to the Pāli tradition, and at arhatship, according to the Sanskrit tradition.

As our mindfulness increases, we become aware of subtler levels of the hindrances. Sometimes dormant levels that have not been recognized get stirred up. Someone who is usually easygoing may find layers of anger and resentment he didn't know he had. Someone who is generally active and alert may find herself dull and sleepy. Doubts that we thought we had resolved — or didn't know we had — suddenly plague us. Making these hindrances the object of mindfulness is a skillful way to defuse them as well as to learn about ourselves and the workings of the mind.

Lethargy and sleepiness make the mind heavy and unserviceable. Lethargy is a rigidity of mind, while sleepiness is not the natural sleepiness that comes when the body is tired, but is a way of inhibiting the mind from progressing on the path by making it doze. Lethargy

and sleepiness arise from distorted attention on discontent. Being bored and dissatisfied, the mind gets sluggish and is unable to function in an alert manner.

The antidote is to give appropriate attention to energy — the initial energy that gets us going, energy in the middle period that maintains and enhances the momentum, and vigorous energy to complete the Dharma task at hand. Exercise and moderation in eating are used to counteract lethargy and sleepiness. Rapid walking meditation energizes the body and mind, as do looking long distances, going outdoors, and breathing fresh air. Good friends and suitable conversations encourage us to practice and increase our energy for practice.

Meditation on light is also very effective. Here temporarily leave aside the primary meditation object and visualize very bright light. Imagine brilliant sunlight fills your body and the environment around you.

Lethargy and sleepiness are likened to being in a prison cell where the space is narrow and restricted and we cannot move. They are eliminated completely at arhatship.

Restlessness and regret. Restlessness and regret are counted as one because both cause uneasiness. Restlessness brings agitation; regret weighs on us by thinking we did not do what we should have done or did do what we should not have done.

Distorted attention to the unsettledness in the mind is the cause. That is, when there is an underlying sense of unease and we do not deal with it in a beneficial way, it becomes worry, fear, restlessness, regret, and anxiety.

Appropriate attention to the peace of the mind is an antidote. For example, mindfulness of breathing releases anxiety, worry, and mental flurry. Restlessness and regret are likened to being enslaved. Wherever a slave tries to go, someone prevents his freedom. Similarly, when guilt, shame, anxiety, and restlessness impose on the mind, we feel there is nowhere safe to turn.

According to the Pāli tradition, regret is abandoned at the nonreturner level and restlessness at arhatship. According to the Sanskrit tradition, both are completely abandoned at arhatship.

Deluded doubt is inclined to the wrong conclusion. It is not the inquisitive doubt that encourages us to learn, question, and seek clarification, but a restive and uncooperative mental state that arises by distorted attention to a topic, such as the existence of the Three Jewels. One antidote that counteracts doubt is contemplating the difference between virtue and nonvirtue, between what is beneficial and what is not beneficial. By cultivating appropriate attention to such topics, we will gain the clarity that knows confusion, attachment, and anger are nonvirtuous, and generosity, ethical conduct, and fortitude are virtuous. Dharma study helps to resolve doubts, and mindfulness of breathing eases the tormenting type of doubt. Making a firm resolve to not let ourselves be submerged by doubts and to continue on the path despite having some doubts helps direct the mind in a constructive direction. Patience is also useful, for we realize that not all of our doubts need to be resolved immediately for us to practice and benefit from the Buddha's teachings.

Deluded doubt is compared to traveling across a barren desert where nothing grows. It is also likened to being at a crossroads in the wilderness with no one around to ask for directions. Deluded doubt has been eradicated by stream-enterers. Although they may still have questions about how to practice, their experience of reality has vanquished doubt about the path and the Three Jewels.

Mindfulness of the Five Aggregates

To make the mind fit to investigate phenomena deeply, concentration is essential, and that necessitates overcoming the five hindrances. For this reason, the five hindrances are the first set in mindfulness of phenomena. Once they have been tamed, the mind can, with clarity and precision, contemplate the nature of mental and physical phenomena by employing the schema of the five aggregates. Cultivating mindfulness of the aggregates involves comprehending the nature, function, causes, and conditions of each aggregate.

All five aggregates exist simultaneously in each moment of our human experience, no matter what we are doing. Sometimes one or another aggregate may be prominent: when we say, "I feel good today," the pleasant feeling is more noticeable; when we're looking for our friend in a crowd, discrimination is chief; when we have to carry

out a plan, intention, which is a miscellaneous factor, is prominent. Beings in the formless realm lack a body and have four aggregates.

The five aggregates are called "the five aggregates subject to clinging"[119] because these five are the basis in dependence on which we cling to I, mine, and my self. We take the aggregates to be identical with ourselves, making them I. We look at them as things we use that belong to us and will bring us pleasure — that is, as mine. In response to the notions of I and mine, we create doctrines and views about the self. Considering the body as I, some people believe that when the body dies, the self becomes nonexistent. This is the view of nihilism. Thinking the self is unchanging, monolithic, and autonomous, other people assert it as an eternal personal identity — a Self, ātman, or soul; this is the absolutist view. They then speculate on whether the Self, ātman, or soul is universal or individual, finite or infinite, with or without form. In this way, so many doctrines and views about the self have arisen throughout human history.

Mindfulness of the five aggregates examines these five bases for grasping I, mine, and my self and knows them for what they are. In the sūtra, the Buddha directs us to contemplate phenomena as phenomena in terms of the five aggregates affected by clinging by understanding each aggregate individually in three phases: its characteristics, its origin, and its cessation (MN 10.38).

The aggregates are listed in the following order to illustrate their increasing subtlety. Forms are coarse and easy to discern. Feelings are internal and subtler. Discriminations are less apparent, miscellaneous factors are difficult to differentiate, and consciousness is even harder to know and understand. Let's first look at the *characteristics* of each aggregate.

1. *Form* in general refers to material objects made of the four great elements — earth, water, fire, and air — and their derivatives, the five sense faculties (the eye faculty and so on), their objects (color and so on), and so forth. When referring to the five aggregates of a sentient being, form is the body.

In *A Ball of Foam Sutta* (SN 22.95) the Buddha gave a simile for each aggregate. Form is likened to a ball of foam. A ball of foam appears solid, but when examined closely it is found to be insubstantial, hollow, empty, and void. So, too, is the body.

2. *Feeling* is the quality of experience — pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. Feelings are classified in several ways, one being according to contact through the six faculties — eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind. Each of these six faculties may experience any of the three feelings.

Feelings are compared to a water bubble. When raindrops hit a puddle of water, bubbles arise and immediately burst. Similarly, when examined with deep mindfulness, only a continuum of moments of feeling is present. Each moment of feeling arises and ceases extremely quickly; it does not last until the next moment. Feelings, too, are void, hollow, and insubstantial.

3. *Discrimination* is a mental factor that selects, discerns, and identifies features of an object. Discerning an object's characteristics and qualities, simple discrimination can lead to the more complex discrimination involved in conceptually categorizing and classifying objects. It is involved in recognizing the object later on. There are six types of discrimination, which are classified according to their object — form, sound, smell, taste, tactile sensation, and mental.

Discriminations are compared to a shimmering mirage seen by tired and thirsty travelers. Water appears, but when examined, no water is to be found. Discriminations deceive us into thinking that there is some lasting pleasure or pain in things. Whether these discriminations are of the past, present, or future, internal or external, coarse or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near, they are in fact void, hollow, and insubstantial.

4. *Miscellaneous factors* shape, construct, alter, and modify the other aggregates.[120] They range from the mental factor of intention to the mental factors of conscientiousness, wrong views, faith, and arrogance. The wide variety of mental factors included in miscellaneous factors influences our feelings, moods, and actions. By coloring the intentions that motivate our actions, miscellaneous factors influence the karma we create and thus the results we experience.

Miscellaneous factors are likened to a plantain tree. Someone may need heartwood, but nowhere is it to be found in a plantain tree, whose core is hollow. Similarly, although a self-existing person appears to be behind each emotion, view, or intention, when examined, no

personal identity or self is to be found in any of the miscellaneous factors.

5. *Consciousness* performs the function of cognizing or illuminating the general aspects of phenomena. There are six primary consciousnesses, classified according to the sense faculty through which it arises: visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile, and mental primary consciousnesses.

Consciousness is compared to a magical show. In ancient India, by reciting mantras or using a special salve, magicians could cause pebbles and sticks to appear as elephants and horses. But someone with clear senses unaffected by these causes of deception will not be fooled. Likewise, in dependence on polluted consciousnesses, we concoct distorted ideas — this is I, this is mine, I like this and not that — that lead to duḥkha.

Of the six consciousnesses, only the mental consciousness is involved in the rebirth process. The active mental consciousness that thinks, evaluates, imagines, remembers, and plans is not present at the moments of death and rebirth; only a subtle continuum of moments of mental consciousness that carries the karmic seeds is. This consciousness is not an everlasting soul or self. When a monk said, "The same consciousness runs and wanders through the round of rebirths" and "it is that which speaks and feels and experiences here and there the result of good and bad actions," the Buddha emphatically corrected him, saying that consciousness arises dependently; it is not I, mine, or a self.

After understanding the characteristics of each aggregate, we investigate its *origin and disappearance*. There are two ways to do this: (1) we know and understand the conditions through which each aggregate arises, and (2) we know and understand the impermanent nature of the aggregate.

Knowing and understanding the conditions through which each aggregate arises. The five aggregates have common conditions that produce them, and each aggregate has its own specific conditions that cause it to arise. Nutriment (edible food) is the condition that supports the existence of the body. After eating, meditators with strong mindfulness are able to be aware of the food being transformed

into energy and nourishing the body. When food is absent, the body withers and dies.

Contact is the specific condition for feeling, discrimination, and miscellaneous factors. Contact is the mental factor that is the coming together of the sense faculty, object, and preceding moment of consciousness. It is the meeting of the consciousness with the object via the sense faculty. For example, the visual consciousness comes into contact with a new car via the eye faculty. This contact leads to the experience of feeling, in this case a pleasant one. Contact leads to the discrimination identifying the object as a car, and to other miscellaneous factors responding to the object, such as attachment. Chief among the miscellaneous factors is the mental factor of intention, which is karma.

The specific conditions for consciousness are name and form as explained in the twelve links of dependent origination.[121]

Conditions common to all five aggregates are ignorance, craving, and karma. The teaching on dependent arising explains that due to ignorance in previous lives, karma was created. Craving instigated the ripening of karmic seeds, bringing forth the five aggregates of a new rebirth. Virtuous karma leads to the five aggregates of a human being or a celestial being (deva); nonvirtuous karma leads to the five aggregates of an animal, hungry ghost, or hell being.

When any of the conditions specific for each aggregate cease, so does that moment of that aggregate. When the contact of seeing the car ceases, the feeling, discrimination, and miscellaneous factors associated with that moment of perception of the car also cease. That is, the pleasurable feeling from seeing the car, the discernment that it is a car, and the intention to drive it all cease. When the common conditions of ignorance, craving, and karma have ceased through wisdom, the five polluted aggregates are eventually extinguished. This is the first way of understanding the arising and disappearance of the aggregates.

Knowing and understanding the impermanent nature of the aggregates. This is done by mindfulness of the constantly changing nature of each aggregate — the fact that it arises and passes away in each micro moment. Here we don't contemplate arising and ceasing occurring due to conditions, but focus on the impermanent nature of

the aggregates. Being transient by nature, the cells in the body continuously arise and cease, feelings are in constant flux, discriminations change, miscellaneous factors are unstable, and moments of consciousness arise and cease without interruption. As mindfulness deepens, it becomes capable of seeing the arising and ceasing of each aggregate at subtler and subtler levels, until their subtle impermanence is directly seen.

At this point, meditators dwell contemplating phenomena internally, externally, and both internally and externally, as described above. As a result, they abide peacefully, without clinging to anything in the world.

Mindfulness of the Six Sources

Regarding mindfulness of the six sources, the sūtra says (MN 10.40):

> How does a monastic abide contemplating phenomena as phenomena in terms of the six internal and six external sources? Here a monastic understands the eye, he understands forms, and he understands the fetter that arises dependent on both. He also understands how there comes to be the arising of the unarisen fetter, and how there comes to be the abandoning of the arisen fetter, and how there comes to be the future nonarising of the abandoned fetter.

The sūtra continues in terms of ears and sounds, the nose and odors, the tongue and tastes, the body and tangibles, the mental faculty (which includes all six consciousnesses) and mental objects. In all these cases, the faculty is the internal source and the object is the external source.

Then with mindfulness, we observe how the six internal and six external sources start a chain of events that leads to duḥkha. In the *Six Sets of Six Sutta* (MN 148) the Buddha explained that dependent on the eye and forms, visual consciousness arises; the meeting of the three is contact. Contact serves as a condition for feeling — pleasant, painful, or neutral — to arise. Delighting in and craving pleasant feelings indicates the underlying tendency to attachment is present. Reacting adversely and being repulsed by a painful feeling shows the

underlying tendency to anger is present. Experiencing a neutral feeling, but not understanding it as it actually is, indicates the underlying tendency to ignorant confusion is present. In this way, the three poisons arise in response when the three feelings are experienced without mindfulness or appropriate attention.

Then the Buddha taught how to abandon the fetters once they have arisen.[122] This begins with restraining the sense sources, especially at the beginning of practice when our mental control is weak. With strong mindfulness, the functioning of the six pairs of sources can be clearly observed. Such mindfulness brings forth strong concentration, which can then examine them with wisdom at a subtle level. When a meditator gains insight into the process of the six objects and six faculties leading to contact, which stimulates feelings that cause fetters to arise, he is able to abandon craving for all the factors in this process by knowing them as impermanent, duḥkha by nature, and selfless. The misery of his body and mind is terminated and his mind rests peacefully.

The understanding of how there comes to be the future nonarising of the abandoned fetter comes by deepening insight into the three characteristics and abandoning the various fetters by progressing through the stages of stream-enterer, once-returner, nonreturner, and arhat.

Mindfulness of the Seven Awakening Factors

The Buddha often spoke about what to abandon and what to practice, and this is a theme in the mindfulness of phenomena. As the main obstacles to serenity, the five hindrances are to be eliminated. As important factors leading to the liberation of mind and deep samādhi, the seven awakening factors are to be cultivated. These seven are the awakening factors of mindfulness, discrimination of phenomena, effort, joy, pliancy, concentration, and equanimity.

Mindfulness of phenomena is also concerned with the development of insight that knows things as they are, and the objects to investigate and understand are the five aggregates, the six internal sources and six external ones, and the four truths.

A mind with serenity can easily be directed toward investigating all the elements of experience with insight, knowing them for what they are — impermanent, in the nature of duḥkha, and selfless.

To review the sequence of topics to be contemplated in the mindfulness of phenomena, a meditator's first task at this point in her practice is to subdue the five hindrances. Doing this makes the mind suitable to understand the five aggregates and six sources. As she progresses, the seven awakening factors, which previously were present but not well developed, now become prominent. Thus the Buddha says (MN 10.42):

> How does a monastic abide contemplating phenomena as phenomena in terms of the seven awakening factors? Here, there being the mindfulness awakening factor in him, a monastic understands, "There is the mindfulness awakening factor in me" or there being no mindfulness awakening factor in him, he understands, "There is no mindfulness awakening factor in me." He also understands how there comes to be the arising of the unarisen mindfulness awakening factor and how the arisen mindfulness awakening factor comes to fulfillment by development.

The sūtra continues in like manner regarding the discrimination of phenomena, effort, joy, pliancy, concentration, and equanimity awakening factors. Mindfulness of each awakening factor has three parts: (1) understanding when it is present in our mind and when it is absent, (2) understanding the causes that make it arise in our mind, and (3) understanding how it is brought to fulfillment once it has arisen. These are explained below.

1. *Mindfulness awakening factor.* The Buddha gave the word "mindfulness" a special meaning that includes not only memory — for example, remembering the teachings we have heard — but also mindfulness of things that are occurring in the present. Both of these meanings pertain to the mindfulness awakening factor.

Mindfulness has been cultivated beginning with the four establishments of mindfulness. After being repeatedly rejuvenated when it was weak, it is now strong enough to become an awakening

factor. We are aware of when it is manifest and functioning well and when it is absent or slacking.

The principal condition causing mindfulness to arise is appropriate attention to the body, feelings, mind, and phenomena, which are the basis for the mindfulness awakening factor. Among other conditions are having mindfulness and introspective awareness, especially during daily life activities, and associating with people who are mindful and want to cultivate mindfulness.

2. *Discrimination of phenomena awakening factor.* As meditation continues, the mindfulness awakening factor is brought to fulfillment by diligent practice. We are able to distinguish subtle mental states, knowing them clearly and precisely. Now, with wisdom, we discern those to cultivate and those to abandon. Appropriate attention to virtuous and nonvirtuous mental states is the condition that brings about discrimination of phenomena. Gradually this ability to discriminate will develop further and can be used to understand the specific characteristics of phenomena and their shared characteristics of impermanence, duḥkha, and selflessness.

Other conditions that cause discrimination of phenomena are investigating the aggregates, personal cleanliness to facilitate the mind functioning clearly, cultivating the five faculties — faith, effort, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom — in a healthy balance, deep reflection and asking questions, associating with wise people, and having the inclination and resolve to cultivate such wise discrimination.

3. *Effort awakening factor.* With practice, discrimination of virtuous and nonvirtuous mental states becomes refined and it is possible to strengthen the former and restrain the latter. As the mind becomes purer and less energy is diverted to nonvirtuous activities, effort to practice comes easily. The conditions for this are appropriate attention to the three phases of energy: arousing effort, continuing with effort, and unstoppable effort that makes it possible to meditate a long time and without needing much sleep. Other conditions are reflecting on the disadvantages and dangers of saṃsāra, the benefits of effort, and the great qualities of the Dharma. Avoiding people who are lazy and associating with those who put energy into Dharma practice also help.

4. *Joy awakening factor.* As effort flows with greater ease, the mind becomes focused and experiences a great sense of purity and joy. The conditions are appropriate attention to the basis for the joy awakening factor — especially the effort that has arisen through mindfulness and discrimination of phenomena. Other conditions are recollecting the Three Jewels and the benefits of ethical conduct, avoiding confused people, and associating with those who have good values.

5. *Pliancy awakening factor.* Joy can be too enticing and there is a danger of becoming attached to it. To counteract this, observing joy and its subtle agitating effects on the mind are important. By releasing attachment to joy and bringing the mind back to the meditation object, joy settles down and bliss arises. Calm and peaceful, bliss enables the mind to settle deeply on the meditation object. At this time, physical and mental pliancy arise.

Balancing the five faculties, being skilled in meditation, avoiding people who are restless, and associating with those who are tranquil are also conditions for pliancy.

6. *Concentration awakening factor.* Pliancy naturally leads to deep concentration. The conditions are appropriate attention on the nimitta — the subtle inner object of meditation that arises when the mind becomes concentrated. This could be a light that is seen only in meditation by the mental consciousness, not by the eye. Although the sign has arisen and has been developed previously, now it is to be protected and strengthened. The concentration awakening factor arises and the mind becomes completely absorbed in the nimitta.

Other conditions are balancing the five faculties and skill in meditation that knows how to calm or exert the mind when needed. Avoiding people who are restless and associating with those who are concentrated also facilitate concentration.

7. *Equanimity awakening factor.* As concentration deepens, equanimity, which has been present, now becomes prominent. This mental factor observes the meditation object without fluctuating. The mind ceases to go up and down, becoming too restless or too dull. Equanimity arises from appropriate attention to overcoming faults and cultivating all conditions for serenity. Abandoning attachment,

not associating with self-centered people, and befriending those who are impartial and open are also conditions.

While the seven awakening factors follow subduing the five hindrances in the sequence outlined in this sūtra, the five hindrances can still arise again if the meditator is not careful. For example, joy is related to sensuality at a very subtle level, so if the meditator's mindfulness slackens while experiencing joy, sensual desire may sneak in. If someone has strong effort but their mindfulness weakens, their effort can become a type of restlessness. Thus a practitioner should not become complacent, thinking that the five hindrances cannot arise during serenity and insight meditation. Continual diligence is necessary to stabilize and deepen spiritual attainments.

The above explanation is from the viewpoint of cultivating serenity, but mindfulness of phenomena is also aimed at developing wisdom, and the seven awakening factors are cultivated during insight practice as well. At that time, with steady concentration — even if it is not at the level of dhyāna — mindfulness focuses on the five aggregates and six sources in terms of their being impermanent, the nature of duḥkha, and selfless. Mindfulness stirs investigation, which invokes great energy. The energy brings joy, and when joy subsides, it gives way to pliancy. While cultivating insight, the meditation object changes because we observe each phenomenon individually, in each moment, as it arises in the mind. Although this is not concentration on one object, it is steady concentration that observes the five aggregates and six sources as they arise and pass away in each moment. This observing mind is equanimous, neither being attached to nor repulsed by impermanence.

Mindfulness of the Four Truths

Observing the three characteristics with insight endowed with the seven awakening factors is the beginning of contemplation on the four truths. This brings mindfulness of phenomena to its true purpose, as we are able to clearly see the dharmas of our experience and thus penetrate the Dharma that is the truth of the Buddha's teachings. Contemplating phenomena as phenomena in terms of the four truths is understanding duḥkha, its origin, its cessation, and the path to that cessation as they actually are.

Observing the three characteristics in the five aggregates and six sources is knowing duḥkha and the objects that are unsatisfactory in nature as they are. Knowing through direct experience that when craving arises, duḥkha follows is understanding the truth of origin. Knowing that when craving subsides so does duḥkha brings understanding of the truth of cessation. Knowing that the path we are practicing will end duḥkha is understanding the truth of the path. Insight into the four truths is increasing, although full penetration and understanding of them has not yet occurred.

When all necessary conditions come together, a disciple with mature faculties knows the three characteristics as they come together as one. This is the point where she can go from the conditioned world to the unconditioned — the point where the mind momentarily breaks through the conditioned world and has a glimpse of nirvāṇa. The mind sees and understands, this is the cessation of duḥkha. At this point the mind cannot hold the realization for long and falls back again to the conditioned world. But now when the person sees the five aggregates, six sources, eighteen constituents, and twelve links of dependent origination, she knows with certainty, this is duḥkha. Seeing that saṃsāra evolves as a result of ignorance and craving, she knows, this is the origin of duḥkha. With her own experience she now knows the āryas' eightfold path is the path leading to the cessation of duḥkha. This first breakthrough experience during which she has direct and full knowledge of the unconditioned establishes her as a stream-enterer. This is the culmination of the four establishments of mindfulness. After insight is developed repeatedly, she will attain the full realization of nirvāṇa and become an arhat.

When teaching the establishment of mindfulness on phenomena, the Buddha presented many different schemas of phenomena to contemplate. Why is this? These schemas present similar factors from different perspectives, providing us with multiple ways to investigate our experience and thus increase our wisdom. The five aggregates are examined primarily because they are the basis on which wrong views of self arise, and the self or person is the one who cycles in saṃsāra, practices the path, and attains nirvāṇa. The six sources emphasize how craving arises from the six faculties and their objects. How craving is abandoned is explained in the twelve links of dependent origination.[123] The seven awakening factors are significant elements in eradicating craving and the five hindrances, and the four truths

encompass the entirety of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa that the self has experienced or will experience.

To conclude the sūtra the Buddha asserts that the four establishments of mindfulness is the direct path that purifies beings and leads to the abolition of duḥkha and the attainment of nirvāṇa.

Just before the Buddha's parinirvāṇa, Ānanda asked the Buddha to "make a statement about the order of monks," hoping he would appoint a successor to lead them. The Buddha replied (DN 16:2.26):

> You should live as islands unto yourselves, being your own refuge, with no one else as your refuge, with the Dhamma as an island, with the Dhamma as your refuge, with no other refuge. And how does a monastic live as an island unto himself … with no other refuge? Here, Ānanda, a monastic abides contemplating the body as body, earnestly, introspectively aware, mindful and having put away all hankering and fretting for the world, and likewise with regard to feelings, mind, and phenomena.

Hearing only the first part of the Buddha's statement, some people interpret being an island unto ourselves as license to do as they see fit. But when we hear the entire passage, it is clear that the Buddha wants people to hold wisdom as their refuge, and that involves holding the Dharma — the true path and true cessation — as our final refuge. To do that, we must have realizations of the path, and those are gained by means of practicing the four establishments of mindfulness.

Mindfulness in Vajrayāna

Mindfulness has a role in tantric practice as well. While doing the meditation of taking death as the path to dharmakāya, at the time of meditating on the clear light, one practices four mindfulnesses: (1) the appearance is clear light, emptiness; (2) we understand this is the emptiness of inherent existence, the actual nature of all phenomena; (3) the experience is bliss; and (4) we hold the divine identity of the resultant dharmakāya, and on this valid base, designate the I.

Another way mindfulness is spoken of in Vajrayāna as expressed in "A Song of the Four Mindfulnesses as a Guide to the View of the Middle Way" by H. H. Kelsang Gyatso, the Seventh Dalai Lama. Here he spoke of mindfulness of the spiritual mentor, mindfulness of compassion, mindfulness of your body as the deity's body, and mindfulness of the view of emptiness.

Bodhisattvas' Practice of the Four Establishments of Mindfulness

The practice of the four establishments of mindfulness becomes a Mahāyāna practice when done with the motivation of bodhicitta, aspiring for full awakening in order to benefit all sentient beings most effectively. These four practices advance bodhisattvas' own practice and also enable them to guide śrāvakas, who make the thirty-seven harmonies their principal practice.

To develop the wisdom that will liberate themselves from saṃsāra, bodhisattvas meditate on the coarse and subtle aspects of the thirty-seven harmonies. They engage with the subtle thirty-seven harmonies with the awareness of their emptiness of inherent existence and their illusion-like nature, and engage with the coarse thirty-seven harmonies with the awareness of their impermanence or lack of self-sufficient substantial existence.

In the context of the four establishments of mindfulness, coarse mindfulness of the body contemplates the body qualified by the emptiness of a self-sufficient substantially existent person, and subtle mindfulness of the body takes as its object the body qualified by the emptiness of inherent existence. This is in line with the Prāsaṅgikas' delineation of coarse and subtle afflictions. Similarly, bodhisattvas cultivate coarse and subtle wisdoms that realize the absence of a self-sufficient substantially existent person and the absence of inherent existence, respectively. The same differentiation of coarse and subtle aspects is made in mindfulness of feelings, mind, and phenomena, contemplating them as lacking a self-sufficient substantially existent person and being empty of inherent existence, respectively.

Bodhisattvas seek to realize the emptiness of inherent existence of the body, feelings, mind, phenomena, and the person designated in

dependence on them, as well as to establish their conventional existence in that they exist by being merely designated by mind. As conventionally existent objects, the body is like an illusion, feelings are like a dream, the mind is like space, and phenomena are like fleeting clouds. In this way, bodhisattvas do both space-like and illusion-like meditation on emptiness.

To cultivate compassion, bodhisattvas meditate on the impure aspects of others' bodies not only to subdue their own sexual desire but also to understand sentient beings' suffering in cyclic existence. Seeing sentient beings bound to foul and fragile bodies as the result of self-grasping ignorance, bodhisattvas generate great compassion and bodhicitta. They practice the six perfections to become fully awakened buddhas so they can more effectively benefit sentient beings in saṃsāra and lead them to awakening as well.

The Selflessness of Phenomena and the Four Establishments of Mindfulness

In your practice of the four establishments of mindfulness, first cultivate a general understanding of the four meditation objects and how to practice mindfulness of them. Then gradually delve into subtler levels. For example, first understand the characteristics of the body that you can easily perceive. By deepening your mindfulness, subtler levels of the nature of the body become apparent. These levels are not fabricated; they are discovered through meditation and can be examined. Then apply meditation instructions found in texts such as Maitreya's *Ornament of Clear Realizations*, Candrakīrti's *Supplement*, and Śāntideva's *Engaging in the Bodhisattvas' Deeds* to the body, feelings, mind, and phenomena. Below is Śāntideva's elucidation of the selflessness of phenomena in terms of the four establishments of mindfulness. The selflessness of phenomena will be explained in more depth in future volumes, but the presentation here will give you a sense of the way bodhisattvas meditate on the four objects in order to realize the ultimate nature of reality.

Ultimate analysis inquires into phenomena's actual mode of existence to determine if phenomena exist inherently, from their own side, and with their own independent essence as they appear to exist.

When we search to identify how the body exists, can we find its essence? Do feelings arise independent of other factors? Is the mind the I?

If something has an independent or inherent essence, we should be able to pinpoint it when investigating what that object actually is. If it cannot be found, the only conclusion to draw is that the object does not possess such an essence. Ultimate analysis refutes the object's inherent existence, not its conventional existence. The object is not totally nonexistent. Conventional existence is not within the purview of ultimate analysis.

Ultimate analysis examines the relationships between cause and effect, a whole and its parts, a phenomenon and its basis of designation, and agent, object, and action. This analysis is not mere intellectual amusement, because the ignorance grasping inherent existence is the root of saṃsāra, the source of our misery and confusion. Proving that ignorance is erroneous because the inherent existence it apprehends does not exist is crucial to our own and others' well-being and awakening.

Selflessness of Phenomena in Relation to Mindfulness of the Body

If the body were truly existent, it should be findable when searched for with ultimate analysis. A truly existent body would exist independent of all other factors — its causes and conditions, its parts, and the mind that conceives and designates it. Śāntideva examines the body in relation to its parts, trying to find the body in its parts, searching for a part or collection of parts that *is* the body. He begins (BCA 9:78):

> A body is neither the feet nor the calves.
>
> Nor is a body the thighs or the hips.
>
> Neither the belly nor the back is the body.
>
> Nor is a body the chest or the arms.
>
> The sides of the torso and the hands are not a body.
>
> Nor is a body the armpits or the shoulders.

The visceral organs also are not it.

And neither is a body the head nor the neck.

So what then is a body?

The body appears to have its own objective existence and we assent to that appearance, believing it to be true. Is it? If the body had objective or inherent existence, it would be findable as either one and the same with its parts or as completely unrelated to them. When we mentally divide the body into its parts, are any of the parts the body? The hands are parts of the body, but they are not a body. Similarly, the feet, torso, internal organs, and head are parts of the body, but they are not a body.

The collection of all these parts is also not a body. Since each part individually is not a body, a collection of non-bodies could not be a body. For example, an apple is not a grapefruit, so a collection of apples cannot be a grapefruit. Furthermore, if the parts of the body were mentally spread out on a mat, we wouldn't see a body. There would be only the collection of the individual parts. The body comes about by our conceptually combining different components into a whole and giving it the name "body." But within that collection a body cannot be found.

We might think of the body as a single unit and ask, "Does a portion of the body exist in each part or does a whole body exist in each part?" But if a portion of the body were located in each part, that would still leave us searching for the whole body. And if a whole body existed in each part, there would be as many bodies as there are parts. For example, when looking at Tashi's body, we would see many bodies because each hand, foot, tooth, and so on would be a body. This is certainly not the case. For these reasons, the body and its parts are not one and the same.

Could a body exist separate from its parts? If a body and its parts were inherently separate, all the parts could be removed and the body itself would remain. But without a head, torso, limbs, and internal organs, a body cannot be found. If the body is neither the same as its parts nor different from them, what is the body? Where can our body be found? In Chan (Zen) this is called the "Great Doubt." If you persist in questioning, there may be a breakthrough when you realize that the body you feel is so real does not exist.

The *Dharmasaṅgīti Sutra* says (ŚS 2):

> One establishes mindfulness with the question, "What is called *the body*?" "This body is like space" ... This body has not come from the past. It does not proceed to the future. It is not present in the past or the future. Other than being something that has arisen from unreal afflictions, it is devoid of an agent or one who experiences, it has no beginning, end, or middle, no fundamental location, no master, no owner, and no possessor. It is designated by the transient labels "assemblage," "body" ... This body has no essence. It arose from the semen and ovum of one's father and mother, is by nature impure, putrid, and foul-smelling. It is troubled by the thieves of attachment, animosity, and confusion and by fear and despair.

REFLECTION

1. Your body appears to be right here; you can see it and touch it.
2. Examine: What exactly is the body? If it inherently exists as an independent entity, you should be able to find it either in its parts or separate from them.
3. If the body were the same as each of its parts, your hand, stomach, pancreas, and so forth would each be a body, and many bodies would exist.
4. If none of them were the body, what body would be here?
5. Is your body here first and then all the organs and limbs are placed inside it to make a body?
6. Are all the body parts collected together and then suddenly a body appears in them?
7. If you still cannot find the body, dwell in the understanding that the body you thought existed as an independent thing that can be pinpointed is empty of existing in that way.

Śāntideva compares our confusion about how the body exists to our thinking an effigy or a scarecrow is a person (BCA 9:83–84):

> Thus, a body is not [truly] existent.
>
> But because of ignorance,
>
> the mind perceiving a [truly existent] body in hands, and so forth, arises,

like the mind perceiving a person in an effigy,

because the [effigy] is shaped in the form [of a person].

For as long as the conditions persist,

the body [of the effigy] is seen as a person.

Likewise, for as long as there is [grasping at true existence] of the hands and so on,

they are seen as the body.

Although a truly existent body does not exist at all, because of ignorance our mind perceives a truly existent body mixed in with the hands and other parts of the body. For example, if we see a scarecrow in a field and mistakenly think it is a person, we'll want to stop and chat with him. The scarecrow may be shaped like a person, but it is not a person, even though our confused mind thinks it is. Similarly, even though the ignorant mind apprehends the body as truly existent, it does not exist that way.

Our mind imputes "person" to the scarecrow due to the arrangement of parts — the pole, straw, clothes, hat, and so forth. The mind also imputes "body" to a collection of parts, such as the skin and so forth. Both the person and the body are mere imputations. However, there is a difference between them. The basis in dependence on which the confused mind imputes "person" — straw and cloth — cannot function as a person. However, the body that exists by being merely imputed in dependence on the collection of bodily parts is capable of functioning as a body.

A nominally existent body is present; it is imputed in dependence on the parts, even though it is neither identical with nor completely separate from its parts. The body is mere name, a mere designation. Saying it is "mere name" doesn't mean that the body is just a name and does not exist. Rather, "mere" excludes its existing from its own side. It means the body exists by being merely designated in dependence on its basis of designation: the collection of its parts.

As long as the conditions to mistake a scarecrow for a person are present — such as dim light and distance — we apprehend it as a person. Once they are removed by our approaching it, this wrong perception ceases. Similarly, as long as the ignorance grasping true existence resides in our mental continuum, we will misapprehend the

collection of parts to be a truly existent body. However, when the wisdom realizing reality dawns in our minds, the wrong perception of a truly existent body ceases. This is the realization of its emptiness.

This concludes showing that the whole or "part possessor" — the body — lacks true existence. In the same way, each part of the body lacks true existence. Looking at one part of the body, such as the hand as a whole, we see that it too is composed of parts. It is not identical to any of the fingers, the palm, or their collection, nor is it totally unrelated to them. Neither a portion of the hand nor the whole hand is found in each finger. The hand is also not found separate from the fingers and palm. Thus, like the body, a truly existent hand cannot be found. A hand exists by being merely designated in dependence on the collection of its parts — the fingers and the palm. Likewise, a finger cannot be found in any of the individual joints, or as a collection of the joints, or separate from the joints.

Continuing to mentally dissect phenomena into smaller and smaller parts, we are unable to find a smallest part that cannot be further subdivided. Although atoms and even subatomic particles may seem to lack parts, if we look closer we see that this is not the case. They are in constant flux, moving here and there. In order to move and to contact other particles, they must have directional parts — a north, east, south, and west side, a top and a bottom. All composite things depend on their parts. Anything that is dependent cannot be independent. Since "independent of all other factors" is the meaning of true existence, no phenomenon exists truly. Śāntideva then asks (BCA 9.87):

> Who with discernment would be attached
>
> to a body that is like a dream?
>
> Since a body does not (truly) exist,
>
> then what is a male and what is a female?

Our identity as male or female is very strong. When our mother gave birth, the first question people asked was, "Is it a girl or a boy?" However, seeing that our biological sex is merely designated in dependence on the shape of a collection of molecules, we can release grasping at truly existent males and females. Women and men come about only through the process of imputation; they do not exist truly, from their own side.

A person with discernment is one who uses probing awareness to examine how things exist. Seeing that all things lack any findable or inherent essence, a wise person dwells in space-like meditative equipoise on emptiness — the absence of inherent existence.

Although all things are empty of true existence, they are not nonexistent. How do they exist? Like dreams, in that they do not exist in the way they appear. When dreaming, we believe the objects and people in our dreams are real. So, too, when we are in the sleep of ignorance, we believe the people and environment around us have independent, findable essences. When we realize that they do not, we awake from the sleep of ignorance and understand that what we formerly believed to be absolutely real was like a dream in that it does not exist the way it appears. Although people and phenomena are empty, they appear. Although they appear, they are empty.

Selflessness of Phenomena in Relation to Mindfulness of Feelings

Feelings are very important to us. All day long, we try to arrange our environment so that we experience only happy feelings and avoid painful feelings. Attachment to feelings is a prime motivator for our actions. When we feel pleasure, we crave for it to continue and do everything possible to make that happen. Faced with suffering, we crave to be free of it and act on that impulse, often neglecting to consider the effects of our actions on ourselves or on others.

What is the actual mode of existence of these feelings that constantly preoccupy us? If they had an inherent nature, perhaps being attached to pleasant feelings and averse to unpleasant ones would be justified. But if they do not have an inherent nature and resemble dreams or illusions, such craving is unsuitable and can be released.

Nāgārjuna inquires into the nature of our mental world of experience (LS 6):

> Since without the felt there is no feeling;
>
> feeling itself is devoid of self.
>
> So you uphold that what is felt too
>
> is devoid of inherent existence.

Feeling is a complex process involving an object of experience (the felt), the subjective experience (the feeling), and the act of experiencing it. Feeling itself is dependent on two factors: the object of the experience and the act of experiencing it. An object that is felt depends on the agent that is feeling it and the action of feeling. The action of experiencing a feeling depends on the agent experiencing it and the feeling that is being experienced. The agent, object, and action are mutually defined; one of them cannot be teased out and identified independent of the other two. In the first two lines, Nāgārjuna says that without the object of experience, there is no subjective feeling. Being dependent, the feeling cannot be independent and lacks inherent existence. In the last two lines, he says that the object is dependent on the feeling that is experienced, so it too is empty of inherent existence.

This investigation of the agent, object, and action is a standard line of reasoning that Nāgārjuna uses repeatedly in the *Treatise on the Middle Way*, where he analyzes concepts such as "coming," "going," "arising," "ceasing," and so forth in terms of these three factors: (1) the agent — who or by which (T. *gang gis*), (2) the object — what (T. *gang*), and (3) the action or process — how (T. *ji ltar*). In the case of investigating feeling, "what" is the felt experience — pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. "Who or by which" has two dimensions. One is the person, the agent who experiences the feeling. The second is the subjective mental state itself. It is also the agent in that it is the medium or instrument through which the feeling is experienced. "How" is the action of feeling. These three exist in dependence on each other. Because they exist dependently, they do not exist inherently.

Bodhisattva āryas, who have directly realized the lack of inherent existence, do not usually grasp feelings to exist inherently. Due to their wisdom, they do not experience painful mental feelings. Due to their merit, they do not experience painful physical feelings, although śrāvaka āryas may.

According to Mādhyamikas, anything that exists inherently cannot depend on causes and conditions and thus is permanent. In that case, a suffering feeling would never cease. But we know through personal experience that suffering ceases. Conversely, if happiness existed truly, it would always arise when a desirable object was

present. However, this is not the case. Delicious food normally produces feelings of pleasure, but when someone is overwhelmed by grief, it does not. If feelings truly existed, this fluctuation could not occur because feelings would not be affected by causes and conditions.

Pain and pleasure do not abide in the objects we contact. If they did, we would always have the same experience when seeing a particular person and everyone else would also have the same feeling arise upon seeing them. If cake were truly pleasurable, eating it when we are full would produce pleasure. Furthermore, everyone would like the same foods. Believing that feelings exist inherently contradicts our daily life experiences.

Seven Point Thought Training speaks of three objects (attractive, unattractive, and neutral), three feelings (pleasure, pain, neutral), and three poisons (attachment, animosity, and confusion). When meeting an attractive object, ordinary beings experience pleasure, and immediately attachment arises for both the object and the feeling. When they encounter an unattractive object, pain or displeasure is experienced and they become upset. When contacting neutral objects, they experience neutral feelings and respond with confusion. Here the unsatisfactory nature of saṃsāra and its lack of lasting peace are vividly apparent. Since we cannot avoid objects that trigger feelings, we need to see that we have a choice regarding our emotional reactions to them and then train our minds in more beneficial and realistic responses to feelings. One method is to recall with compassion that all sentient beings experience these three feelings and the disturbing emotions they provoke. Then imagine taking these feelings and disturbing emotions from sentient beings so that they can experience peace. Follow this by imagining that you give them your happiness. This practice of "taking and giving" functions to increase our love and compassion and reduce our three poisons.

When skilled practitioners experience pleasure and happiness, they recognize that these feelings are not truly existent and are like dreams. They do not crave for happiness to continue and do not become anxious when suffering arises. They feel compassion for others who are unaware of the actual nature of feelings and respond to feeling with craving that leads to the creation of afflictive karma.

Śāntideva employs many reasonings to refute the inherent existence of the body, feelings, mind, and phenomena because he is addressing practitioners with sharp faculties. While one reasoning is sufficient to establish phenomena's emptiness of inherent existence, understanding emptiness through many reasonings swiftly consumes the obscurations to liberation and awakening and enables bodhisattvas to teach others about emptiness in a skillful manner.

In this light, Śāntideva now refutes the true existence of feelings by refuting the true existence of their cause, contact. He begins by questioning assertions that sense faculties and their objects are made of partless particles.

In order for a consciousness with its accompanying feeling to arise, three conditions are necessary: the object, the sense faculty, and an immediately preceding moment of consciousness. The combination of these three gives rise to contact, which allows the characteristics of the object to be known. Contact then gives rise to feeling. If these three factors existed truly, they would give rise to truly existent contact followed by truly existent feeling.

The sense faculties for the five physical senses are subtle forms, and their objects are also form. According to Vaibhāṣikas and Sautrāntikas, forms are composed of partless particles — subtle particles that have no sides or parts. Śāntideva asks: if a gap or space existed between the sense faculty and its object so that they did not touch, how could contact occur? Without the two touching, the sense faculty could not contact the object and feeling could not arise. On the other hand, if the partless particles of the sense faculty touched the partless particles of the object, the two would collapse into one. This is because particles that lack directional parts cannot have one side that touches another particle and another side that does not. Without the particles of both the sense faculty and the object having sides (directional parts), they could not contact each other.

If they do meet, each one should have a side that touches the other and another side that doesn't. If each one lacks two sides, the two particles would merge together. However, being partless particles they cannot merge because there is no space within them and they are the same size.

Some scientists seek the smallest particle that cannot be subdivided and is the ultimate building block of the universe. Years ago, it was thought that atoms were that indivisible unit, but then it was found that atoms were composed of other particles and could be subdivided. Since then, a variety of subatomic particles have been discovered, but none of them has been shown to be ultimately the smallest.

Furthermore, contact between the immediately preceding consciousness and its object isn't possible. Since the consciousness is immaterial, it cannot physically contact a sense faculty that is material. In the context of things being truly existent, such an aggregation of the three — consciousness, sense faculty, and object — cannot occur. This aggregation, which is contact, is composed of parts and is dependent on its parts, meaning contact is a mere designation in the same way that the body is a mere designation dependent on the collection of its parts and the mind that designates it.

Since truly existent contact does not exist, it cannot give rise to truly existent feelings. Since feelings arise dependently, why should we tire ourselves out craving pleasurable feelings?

Feelings also do not exist truly as they appear to; they are like dreams. Since pleasurable feelings have no essence, why go through so much effort to have them?

Before refuting the selflessness of phenomena in *Engaging in the Bodhisattvas' Deeds*, Śāntideva established the selflessness of persons. There is no sense in craving happiness and fearfully rejecting suffering when neither the person experiencing those feelings nor the feelings themselves truly exist. Since both the persons who experience feelings and the feelings are not ultimately findable entities, the craving that arises based on grasping at their true existence can be eliminated. By familiarizing ourselves with the view of emptiness, ignorance and craving are worn away until they are finally eradicated, leading to liberation.

The person experiencing feelings and the feelings exist conventionally. Arhats and buddhas have feelings, but having destroyed self-grasping ignorance, they do not grasp them as truly existent. Nevertheless, happiness and suffering exist dependently, so mindfulness of the actions that produce them is important. One of

the principal ways in which karma ripens is the production of feelings: constructive karma produces happiness, whereas destructive karma leads to suffering.

Each consciousness has a feeling component that arises simultaneous with it. If that feeling existed from its own side, it could not be experienced by that mind. This is because the feeling would exist independent of everything else and would have no relationship with the consciousness that it accompanies.

In the context of true existence, a mind could not experience a feeling that arises before or after it. Feelings that arose before that moment of mind have already ceased when that mind arises, and cannot be experienced by that mind. Feelings arising after that moment of mind have not yet arisen, and that moment of mind cannot experience them. If feelings existed truly, it would be impossible for any mind — before, simultaneous, or after a feeling — to experience it. In this case there would be no experiencer (the mind) and nothing that is experienced (the feeling).

If the mind cannot experience feeling, then nothing else can either. Feeling cannot experience itself because then the experiencer and the experienced would be the same, and that is not tenable. Asserting truly existent feelings is a conundrum!

Selflessness of Phenomena in Relation to the Mindfulness of the Mind

The presence of the mind demarcates the difference between a corpse and a living being. The mind cognizes, experiences, perceives, and feels. Both saṃsāra and nirvāṇa depend on the mind, and it is the mind that is transformed by practicing the path. Most people have never asked themselves what their mind is or how it exists. Does it exist as a self-enclosed, independent entity? Is it independent and findable when searched for with ultimate analysis? Or does it exist like a dream, appearing truly existent even though it is not?

Where could a truly existent mind exist? It is not in the sense faculties — the eyes, ears, and so forth — nor is it in the objects that the mind cognizes — forms, sounds, and so forth. It cannot be found between the object and sense faculty. It is not the body and cannot be

found either inside the body or completely separate from it. The notion of a truly existent mind is fabricated by distorted conception and ignorance. The *Ratnacūḍa Sūtra* says (ŚS 7–8):

> Kāśyapa, even though one looks for the mind everywhere, it is not found. Whatever is unfindable is unobservable. Whatever is unobservable does not arise in the past, or in the future, or in the present. Whatever does not arise in the past, or in the future, or in the present really transcends the three times. Whatever transcends the three times is neither [inherently] existent nor [totally] nonexistent.

When we search for exactly what the mind is using ultimate analysis, there is nothing we can identify as the mind. Rather, the mind is what exists by being merely designated in dependence on a continuum of moments of mental states.

Because no truly existent mind exists, sentient beings have natural nirvāṇa (*prakṛti-nirvṛta*), meaning that their minds are, by their very nature, free from true existence. This natural emptiness of the mind is one aspect of buddha nature; it makes possible the elimination of obscurations and the attainment of liberation and awakening.[124] When we realize that the mind does not exist from its own side, the grasping at such a mind subsides. By familiarizing ourselves with this realization we will be able to cleanse all obscurations from our minds.

Saying that a truly existent mind cannot be found in any of the various types of mind or separate from them does not mean that the mind is totally nonexistent. The mind exists nominally, as do all phenomena: it functions, it arises and ceases. Since each moment of mind is dependent on causes and conditions, the mind can be transformed. There are many types of mind, including primary consciousness, mental factors, and virtuous and nonvirtuous states of mind. All of these perform their own function although they lack any inherent essence.

If we search for a truly existent mind that perceives yellow, can we find it? If the mind existed before yellow, yellow could not be perceived because it wouldn't exist yet. If the cognizing mind and the object existed simultaneously, yellow would not be the cause for the perception because causes must always precede their effects. If a truly

existent perceiver existed after the yellow, it could not perceive yellow because yellow would have already ceased. While conventionally the object of a perceiver exists just prior to that perceiving consciousness, if things existed truly this could not be the case. A truly existent perceiver is independent of all other factors and would not depend on an object or a sense faculty to arise. Similarly, a truly existent object cannot produce a perceiver of that object because it would exist independent of any mind.

Selflessness of Phenomena in Relation to the Establishment of Mindfulness of Phenomena

The *Ārya Lalitavistara Sūtra* states (ŚS 13):

> Composite phenomena are impermanent and unstable. They are subject to destruction, like an unbaked pot. They are like a borrowed article. Like a sandcastle, they do not last long. These composite phenomena are destructible … They are fragile, for they depend on cooperative conditions. Composite phenomena are like the diminishing flame of a lamp, for their nature is to quickly arise and pass away. Like the wind, they do not remain long. Like a bubble, they are fragile and devoid of an essence. Composite phenomena are unmoving and empty. When investigated, they are seen to be like a mound of plantain trees. Like an illusion, they delude the mind … All changes in composite phenomena are brought about by causes and conditions, with one acting as the cause for another, which arises in dependence on it.

By contemplating the selflessness of composites — conditioned things such as the body, feelings, and mind — we ascertain that the truly existent arising of any thing is impossible. In the *Treatise on the Middle Way*, Nāgārjuna asks: If there are no truly existent composites, how can there be truly existent uncompounded phenomena? If conditioned phenomena do not truly exist, neither can unconditioned phenomena, because the latter are posited in dependence on the former. For example, true cessation, an unconditioned phenomena, is posited on the basis of a mind that is

freed from all defilements. True cessation is a quality of this mind, and this mind is conditioned.

As a Mādhyamika, Śāntideva wishes to demonstrate emptiness as an attribute of all phenomena, so this section on the mindfulness of phenomena is a short summation of the previous arguments; it is not a presentation of the emptiness of mental objects. However, arguments similar to the ones that refute the inherent existence of the body, feelings, and mind can be applied to mental objects as well. Seeing that all phenomena exist only by name, we meditate on their emptiness.

The Benefits of the Four Establishments of Mindfulness

The four establishments of mindfulness follow a particular sequence. Establishing mindfulness on the body is first because we ordinary beings think the body is the place where an independent I is located. Mindfulness of feelings follows because we ignorantly think feelings are what an independent self enjoys. Mindfulness of the mind is next because we erroneously believe the self is the mind that thinks and perceives. Or, put another way, we adhere to the false belief that the mind is an independent self. All the tenet systems below Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka identify the mind, the continuity of mind, or one type of mind as the ultimate illustration of the self. Prāsaṅgikas, however, say the mere I — the person that is merely designated in dependence on the aggregates — is the illustration of the person. Mindfulness of phenomena follows because ordinary beings mistakenly believe our emotions and attitudes are what makes an independent self afflictive or worthwhile. In brief, on the basis of the body, feelings, mind, and phenomena, ignorance generates abundant misconceptions that keep us bound in saṃsāra.

In short, seeing the body as impure, we investigate its origins and see that it came from karma created by afflictions. Afflictions arose due to afflictive feelings. Tracing the origin of feelings leads us to investigate the nature of mind, and through this we see that the mind is neutral and its nature is pure. Having the wish for happiness, we seek a method to free the mind from the afflictions, which arise from

feelings, which in turn keep us bound to this impure body. Investigating the method to attain happiness, we discern what to cultivate and what to abandon on the path. Through mindfulness and probing wisdom, we see that although the body, feelings, mind, and mental factors are the basis of designation of the person, they are not the person. There is no independent person that is findable by analysis seeking the person's ultimate mode of existence. The I is empty of inherent existence. Continuous meditation on this cuts the ignorance that is the root of saṃsāra.

When meditating on the body, feelings, mind, and phenomena, it is important to observe your own experiences. Don't think about these topics intellectually or abstractly, but examine your body and see its impurity. Observe your feelings and experience for yourself their suffering nature. Focusing on your mind, recognize its momentariness and determine that the mind is not you.

The four establishments of mindfulness help us to understand our daily life experiences. For example, when people fall ill or suffer from aging, many of them are caught by surprise and think these experiences should not happen. Their mind rejects these events, thinking that they happen only to other people. Through mindfulness of the body, we discover that the body is unclean, impermanent, and duḥkha by nature. We also understand that the mind arises and changes dependent on causes and conditions. Being dependent on these factors, the mind lacks independent existence. Understanding this enables us to accept the reality of illness, aging, and death because they are simply the nature of the body.

The purpose of meditating on the four establishments of mindfulness is to discern what to practice and what to abandon and then to train our body, speech, and mind accordingly so that we can free ourselves from saṃsāra. By countering the four distorted conceptions, the four establishments of mindfulness deepen our understanding of the four truths. In addition, these meditations make the aspiration for liberation arise within us, show us the way to liberation, and generate within us the wisdom that leads to that goal.

Mindfulness of the body examines the nature of this body and sees that it is composed of tissue, organs, and bone, none of which are attractive. This body produces foul substances while alive and becomes an ugly corpse when it dies. Seeing this, we overcome the

distorted conception of the body as clean and pure and gain a clear insight into the first truth, the truth of duḥkha, because we become well aware of the unsatisfactory nature of our body.

Through mindfulness of feelings, we observe the physical and mental feelings that we experience throughout the day. When the mind becomes involved in these feelings — craving pleasurable ones, desiring to be free from unpleasant ones, not wanting neutral feeling to change into suffering — we veer off balance. Mindfulness of feelings overcomes the distorted conception that what is unsatisfactory in nature is pleasurable and brings awareness of the second truth, the truth of the origin of duḥkha, because we see clearly how ignorance and craving bring duḥkha.

When we try to point to where this I or self is, we usually identify our mind. Although the self does not exist in the mind, and the mind is not the self, from habit and misconception we identify the mind as the self. But when we carefully reflect on the nature of the mind, we understand that the mind is composed of many parts — the mind of the past, the mind of the future, and the mind of the present — and thus is not a unitary whole. By examining the present mind, we see its momentary nature: it continually changes in each nanosecond and depends on many factors, such as its causes. This leads to understanding that there is no permanent, unitary, and independent self based on this mind and eliminates the grasping at such a self. Thus mindfulness of the mind is associated with overcoming the distorted conception holding the impermanent as permanent. And by making evident the lack of a permanent, unitary, and independent self, mindfulness of the mind leads us to see the possibility of eradicating self-grasping ignorance and attaining the third truth, the truth of the cessation of duḥkha and its causes.

The practice of mindfulness of phenomena involves contemplating the fifty-three phenomena of the afflictive class associated with cyclic existence and the fifty-five phenomena of the pure class associated with the path to nirvāṇa. Reflecting on the specific and general characteristics of these two kinds of phenomena brings knowledge of how to traverse the stages of the path and understanding of the fourth truth, the true path. The essence of the true path is the realization of selflessness; thus mindfulness of phenomena destroys the distorted conception that what lacks a self

has one and brings understanding that all phenomena are empty of true existence.

Since the four establishments of mindfulness eliminate the four distorted conceptions and bring understanding of the four truths, it is a comprehensive and profound practice. By practicing as explained above, our positive qualities will grow, and correct understanding will increase in power, so that liberation and awakening will become not only an aspiration but a reality. In *Differentiation of the Middle and the Extremes* (*Madhyāntavibhāga* 4:1), Maitreya concludes:

> Because [the body] is unmanageable,
>
> because [feelings] are the cause of craving,
>
> because [the mind] is the ground,
>
> and because [the path] is not ignorant,
>
> one is led to realize the four truths [of āryas].
>
> Therefore, meditate on the establishments of mindfulness.

In short, mindfulness is a mental factor that is active in many types of meditation. Practices that rely heavily on mindfulness, such as the four establishments of mindfulness, are embedded in the structure of the Buddhist path to liberation as a branch of the thirty-seven harmonies with awakening. For their true purpose to be accomplished and maximum benefit derived, these mindfulness practices are done with refuge in the Three Jewels and the aspiration to attain liberation or full awakening.

14 | The Thirty-Seven Harmonies with Awakening

IN THE *Greater Discourse to Sakuludāyin* (MN 77), the ascetic Sakuludāyin stated that the Buddha's disciples revere the Buddha because he lives in seclusion, eats little, is satisfied with whatever alms food he receives, is content with any robe he has, and with whatever place he sleeps — even in a cemetery. The Buddha replied that if this were the criteria for his disciples' respect, then they would venerate those who are more ascetic than he. Rather, they respect him because he teaches the four establishments of mindfulness, four supreme strivings, four bases of spiritual power, five faculties, five powers, seven awakening factors, and the āryas' eightfold path — that is, the thirty-seven harmonies.

In the sūtra *What Do You Think about Me?* (MN 103), the Buddha's disciples proclaim that they treasure him not because he teaches the Dharma for the sake of receiving offerings, but because he seeks their welfare and teaches the Dharma with compassion. What is that Dharma? The four establishments of mindfulness, four supreme strivings, four bases of spiritual power, five faculties, five powers, seven awakening factors, and the eightfold path — that is, the thirty-seven harmonies.

In the *Connected Discourses on the Unconditioned* (SN 43.5–11), the Buddha asked, "What is the path leading to the unconditioned — to nibbāna?" Here, too, he listed each of the thirty-seven harmonies individually. Clearly these are the essence of his teaching that he wishes his followers to study, reflect on, and meditate on so that they will attain the lasting peace of nirvāṇa.

The thirty-seven harmonies are called "harmonies with awakening" because they are requisites for the attainment of awakening and are conducive to awakening. In the Pāli tradition "awakening" in this context refers to the four supramundane paths and the fruits of stream-enterers and so forth. In the Sanskrit tradition, it refers to the final goal of any of the three vehicles — arhatship or buddhahood. In both traditions, some of the thirty-seven are supramundane paths, others are not.

We covered the four establishments of mindfulness in the preceding chapter and will now continue with the other six sets. The English translations of the Sanskrit and Pāli sūtra passages listing these sets are very similar, so sometimes we will reference the Pāli passage and at other times the Sanskrit passage. When the explanations in the two traditions are similar, they are interwoven; when there are differences they are explained separately. None of the differences contradict meanings found in the other tradition.

The Four Supreme Strivings

Meditation on the fourth establishment of mindfulness — the mindfulness of phenomena — inspires us to develop positive qualities and remove disturbing emotions. The four supreme strivings (*samyak pradhāna*, *sammāpadhāna*) are the way to do this.[125] The *Sūtra on the Ten Grounds* says (STG 54.62):

> The four supreme strivings are like this: (1) To prevent the arising of nonvirtues that have not yet arisen, he generates aspiration, makes effort,

> arouses energy, holds the mind firmly, and steadfastly places the mind. (2) To abandon the nonvirtues that have arisen he generates aspiration ... (3) To generate virtues that have not yet arisen, he generates aspiration ... (4) To maintain and enhance virtues that have arisen, he generates aspiration, makes effort, arouses energy, holds the mind firmly, and steadfastly places the mind.

The first two supreme strivings are practiced with respect to afflictions and destructive actions — to eliminate those already manifest and avoid generating new ones in the future. The latter two are practiced in relation to positive qualities — strengthening and expanding those already cultivated and cultivating new ones that have yet to be cultivated. These four supreme strivings are called "forms of effort"; they are "supreme" because, combined with the bodhicitta motivation, they will lead to full awakening.

The sutra instructs us to practice by generating aspiration, making effort, arousing energy, holding the mind firmly, and steadfastly placing the mind. That particular sequence is because the four supreme strivings are meditation practices to enhance serenity and insight.

With *aspiration*, we engage in the meditative practices of the four supreme strivings. *Making effort* is the remedy to the imbalance of serenity and insight. This is accomplished by means of the three: serenity, holding the mind firmly, and equanimity. During meditation, if insight is more powerful than serenity, the mind is not in balance and is compared to a lamp in the wind. When the lamp of serenity isn't stable, suchness cannot be firmly held in mind. Strengthening serenity is the remedy. But at other times serenity is strong while insight is weak; although the mind is stable, ultimate reality cannot be discerned clearly. *Holding the mind firmly* remedies this. When serenity and insight are in balance, the mind remains in equanimity.

Arousing energy means to eliminate laxity and restlessness, two faults impeding serenity. *Holding the mind firmly* remedies laxity. When laxity arises in the mind, the mind is drawn inside and the intensity of the clarity is lacking. Applying antidotes to uplift the mind — such as visualizing light or reflecting on precious human life — counteracts laxity. *Steadfastly placing the mind* is the remedy to restlessness. To settle the mind, apply antidotes that make the mind more sober, such as contemplating death and impermanence.

The Four Supreme Strivings in the Pāli Tradition

The four supreme strivings are spoken of in the *Connected Discourses on the Supreme Strivings* (SN 49). In practicing each of the four, after generating the aspiration, a practitioner makes effort, arouses energy, applies his mind, and strives, all of which describe different ways to apply effort.

1. A practitioner arouses the aspiration and applies effort to *prevent or restrain afflictions and nonvirtuous mental states from arising*. To do this, we must restrain the senses and the mind. For example, restraining our eyes from looking at all the ads on our digital devices will prevent greed and attachment from arising. Restraining our mind from mulling over others' faults impedes malice from consuming the mind.

2. A practitioner arouses the aspiration and makes effort to *abandon or overcome nonvirtuous states that have already arisen*. If we experience jealousy, for instance, instead of tolerating it, we overcome it by rejoicing in others' virtues.

3. A practitioner generates the aspiration and makes effort to *bring into being virtuous states that haven't yet arisen*. Here we make effort to cultivate any and all virtuous practices

of studying, thinking, and meditating, and specifically to cultivate the four establishments of mindfulness and the seven awakening factors. When our mind lacks familiarity with these qualities, we make effort to practice them.

4. A practitioner generates the aspiration and arouses effort to *maintain virtuous states that have arisen — to strengthen and enhance them and to prevent them from degenerating*. Doing this enables us to protect virtuous mental states and bring them to full maturity. Specifically, it refers to sustaining favorable meditation objects so that full samādhi can be attained.

With these four supreme strivings, a practitioner is said to "slant, slope, and incline toward nibbāna." The aspiration mentioned above is a virtuous desire or wish. Striving is synonymous with effort (*vīrya*, *viriya*), and with it the mind is able to abandon nonvirtuous states such as attachment, anger, and confusion, whether they have already arisen or have the potential to arise. Supreme striving leads to the cultivation of the virtuous mental states of nonattachment, nonanger, and nonconfusion.

Striving is the mental factor that leads to the abandonment of the floods,[126] the underlying tendencies, the various types of craving, and the higher fetters of attachment to the form and formless states, conceit, restlessness, and ignorance. In its fully developed form, striving is the path factor of effort in the supramundane path.[127]

REFLECTION

1. Consider that a nonvirtuous thought or action that hasn't yet arisen could arise in your mind. Imagine how generating aspiration, making effort, arousing energy, holding your mind firmly, and steadfastly placing the mind could prevent this.
2. Make an example of a nonvirtue that has arisen and generate aspiration, make effort, arouse energy, hold your mind firmly, and steadfastly place the mind to subdue that thought.
3. Think of a virtuous quality you would like to have and apply the above steps to generate it.
4. Think of a virtuous quality you already have and apply the above steps to enhance it.
5. Feel that you now have new tools to apply to help you become the kind of person you would like to be.

The Four Bases of Spiritual Power

The Sanskrit *ṛddhipāda* and the Pāli *iddhipāda* can be translated as "bases of spiritual power" or "legs of magical feats." *Ṛddhi* (*iddhi*) refers to supernormal powers that are gained through mental development, specifically deep concentration. The worldly supernormal powers include making manifestations of one's body, flying in the air, walking on water, passing through walls or mountains, going under the earth, becoming invisible and then visible again, and so forth. The Buddha said the highest supernormal power is unpolluted liberation of the mind, nirvāṇa.

The *Ornament of Sūtras* (*Mahāyāna Sūtrālaṃkāra*) discusses the four bases of spiritual power in detail, saying that their purpose is to generate numerous emanations by which the meditator can travel to various buddha fields. *Pāda* literally means foot, thus the common Tibetan translation for *ṛddhipāda* is legs of magical emanations. Just as our legs take us places, with the four concentrations we can emanate many bodies and go to many buddha lands to hear teachings from and make offerings to a multitude of buddhas.

By extension, *pāda* can mean basis or foundation. Just as the body rests on the feet, spiritual powers — both miraculous feats and the ultimate spiritual power of liberation — rest on these four.

The *Sūtra on the Ten Grounds* says (MMAB 51):

> The four bases of spiritual power are like this: (1) The basis of spiritual power of *aspiration* combined with concentration, and the application [of antidotes] that abandon [faults], abides in isolation, abides in detachment, abides in cessation, and is meditation directed toward thorough complete abandonment. (2) Similarly, the basis of spiritual power of *effort* ... (3) Similarly, the basis of spiritual power of *intention* ... (4) Similarly, the basis of spiritual power of *investigation* combined with concentration [and] zeal, abiding in isolation, abiding in detachment, abiding in cessation, and directed toward thorough complete abandonment.

The application [of antidotes] that abandon [faults] refers to overcoming the five hindrances and five faults that interfere with serenity. *Abides in isolation* can refer to the physical isolation of living in a remote place distant from worldly distractions, or to the mental isolation of being separated from conceptual chatter. *Abides in detachment* is being content with little and having few needs and wants. *Abides in cessation* means ceasing distractions as well as ceasing the three poisons.

The four establishments of mindfulness are the mental factor of mindfulness with the presence of wisdom, the four supreme strivings are the mental factor of effort, and the four bases of spiritual power are concentrations. With the four supreme strivings, practitioners make effort to reduce and eliminate afflictions and destructive actions and to strengthen positive qualities. By refining their serenity they attain a concentration in which the mind is serviceable. The four bases of spiritual power are exalted knowers of someone who has entered the path and are concentrations attained by applying zeal so that the eight antidotes overcome the five faults, as in the explanation of attaining serenity. The five faults, eight antidotes, and nine stages of sustained attention are usually taught at this point.

The four bases of spiritual power are concentrations (*samādhi*) — the concentrations of aspiration, effort, intention, and investigation. They are not the mental factors of aspiration, and so forth, but are concentrations concomitant with them. Aspiration, effort, intention, and investigation are the means to refine concentration in order to develop spiritual powers, such as the first five superknowledges. Practitioners who train in these four concentrations develop special powers to emanate and transform themselves and other objects; they can make their bodies very large, emanate several bodies, transform an ugly place into a beautiful one, and so on.

The four are practiced sequentially when training to make manifestations. First one has the aspiration to make a manifestation. This arouses the effort to do so. This leads to the intention that draws the mind to the object, and then to investigation of the instructions. All four of these powerful concentrations are present when a manifestation is being made.

1. The base of spiritual power of *aspiration* (*chanda*) is those qualities primarily associated with concentration that are achieved through intense aspiration to cultivate virtue and the effort of rigorous application.

2. The base of spiritual power of *effort* (*vīrya*, *viriya*) is those qualities primarily associated with concentration that are achieved through the effort of consistent

application. This application is smooth, peaceful, and continuous, not aggressive, laborious, or tiring.

In general, virtuous antidotes may be applied in two ways. With rigorous application, we practice energetically but not consistently. With consistent application, we practice steadily but lack rigor and intensity. For our meditation to bear the best results, both rigorous and consistent effort to apply antidotes and cultivate virtuous qualities are needed.

3. The base of spiritual power of *intention* (*citta*) is those qualities primarily associated with concentration that are achieved through familiarization and having previously practiced concentration. Someone may have miraculous powers although she has not engaged in extensive cultivation of concentration in this life. These powers are the ripening of latencies on her mindstream from having previously developed concentration in previous lives.

4. The base of spiritual power of *investigation* (*mīmāṃsā*, *vīmaṃsā*) is those qualities primarily associated with concentration that are achieved through discriminating investigation shared by others. That is, someone teaches a practitioner how to do a meditation practice. She examines these instructions, practices them, and gains single-pointed concentration.

Two factors contribute to each spiritual power. One is the factor unique to each — aspiration, effort, intention, or investigation. The other is the concentration and zeal necessary to develop the concentration that becomes a basis for spiritual power.

One way of speaking about the four bases of spiritual power is in terms of eliminating the five faults that impede serenity. Through aspiration, we develop confidence and devotion to the practice, which counteracts the first fault, laziness. Effort enables us to retain the instructions and remember the object of meditation, eliminating the fault of forgetting the object and the instructions. Intention opposes the faults of restlessness and laxity by promoting the application of their antidotes and dispelling the fault of neglecting to apply them. Investigation is alert and dispels the fault of applying an antidote when one isn't needed.

The Four Bases of Spiritual Power: Pāli Tradition

These are explained in the *Connected Discourses on the Bases for Spiritual Power* (SN 51):

> Monastics, these four bases for spiritual power, when developed and cultivated, lead to going beyond from the near shore to the far shore. What four? Here monastics, a monastic develops the basis for spiritual power that possesses concentration due to (1) *aspiration* and the volitional formations of striving, thinking, "Thus my aspiration will be neither too slack nor too tense; and it will be neither constricted internally nor distracted externally." And he dwells perceiving after and before: "As before, so after; as after, so before; as below, so above; as above, so below; as by day, so at night; as at night, so by day." Thus with a mind that is open and unenveloped, he develops the mind imbued with luminosity. He develops the basis for spiritual power that possesses concentration due to (2) *effort* ..., (3) *mind* or *intention* ..., and (4) *investigation* ...

The four bases for spiritual power are explained:

1. *Aspiration* or desire is a deep desire or wish to attain spiritual powers. It fuels a practitioner's efforts to attain samādhi.

2. Through emphasizing *effort*, a practitioner cultivates the concentration that leads to spiritual powers.

3. Another practitioner may emphasize calming his *mind*, making it tranquil, pure, and radiant. This gentle but firm approach brings clarity of mind, and through this one gains the concentration that is a basis for spiritual attainments.

4. *Investigation* examines the mind and what factors promote and hinder its development. Alternatively, fueled by a wish to analyze and realize the nature of reality, a practitioner strives to attain concentration.

Using the example of the first base for spiritual power, in the sūtra passage above, "aspiration that is too slack" is aspiration associated with lassitude and "aspiration that is too tense" is aspiration associated with restlessness. "Aspiration that is constricted internally" is aspiration accompanied by lethargy and sleepiness, and "aspiration that is distracted externally" is repeatedly disturbed by sensual desire. "Perceiving after and before" has several meanings, one of them being the ability to focus continuously on the meditation object during the entire meditation session. "Perceiving below and above" refers to reviewing all the parts of the body from the soles of the feet to the tips of the hair on the head and back down again. "Dwelling by day and night" means that the practitioner develops the aspiration base of spiritual power by striving in a similar way in both the daytime and the night. "Developing the mind imbued with luminosity" means that when the practitioner sits on a terrace and pays attention to the perception of light alternating between eyes open and eyes closed, the light appears to be the same.

Having cultivated the four bases of spiritual power, a practitioner attains the five superknowledges. Once concentration is attained by means of aspiration, effort, mind, or investigation together with the volitional formations of striving, it can be combined with wisdom and used to attain the sixth superknowledge, the destruction of pollutants. Then the practitioner can abide in the liberation of mind and liberation by wisdom.

Aspiration, effort, a receptive and clear mind, and investigation are useful traits in our daily life as well. They facilitate our ability to attain the goals we seek. When these goals are spiritual, the four support the concentration that has the power to plummet the depth of the truth and bring liberation.

The Five Faculties and Five Powers

These five qualities — faith, effort, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom — are essential to gain all Mahāyāna virtuous qualities. The five faculties (*indriya*) have strong influence to oppose their opposites — indecision, laziness, forgetfulness, distraction, and ignorance. The five powers (*bala*) are the same mental factors that cannot be shaken by their opposites and are empowered with respect to their object, the four truths. They are paths that have great power to produce their effects, the ārya paths. All five may simultaneously accompany a single primary consciousness.

Regarding the five faculties, the *Sūtra on the Ten Grounds* says (MMAB 51):

> The five faculties are like this: (1) The faculty of faith abides in isolation, abides in detachment, abides in cessation, and is meditation that is meditation directed toward thorough complete abandonment. (2) Similarly, the faculty

> of joyous effort ... (3) Similarly, the faculty of mindfulness ... (4) Similarly, the faculty of concentration ... (5) Similarly, the faculty of wisdom faith abides in isolation, abides in detachment, abides in cessation, and is meditation directed toward thorough complete abandonment.

1. Here *faith* refers to convictional faith, which has confidence and trust in the path of practice and the resultant liberation or full awakening. This faith arises from investigation, so it is naturally combined with wisdom and has conviction in the four truths. It also includes faith based on accepting scriptural quotations describing very obscure phenomena. This is not blind acceptance but is based on analyzing the reliability of a scripture's content.[128] Faith is a basis for all virtuous qualities. With it the mind is joyful, inspired, and enthusiastic.

According to their mental capacity, people generate faith by different means. Those of sharp faculties generate faith in the four truths, for example, through reasoning, investigation, and analysis. Those of modest capacities have faith in them because the Buddha or someone whom they respect explained them. A person may start out accepting a teaching due to her respect for the Buddha; but after hearing more teachings and being encouraged to investigate their meaning, she will develop confidence based on examination and understanding.

2. *Effort* enables us to quickly realize the four truths and takes delight in overcoming true duḥkha and true origins and in actualizing true cessation and true paths. Effort may also be enthusiasm to practice the six perfections. Like faith, effort is essential for the cultivation of virtuous qualities.

3. *Mindfulness* ensures that we do not forget the objects and aspects of the four truths. For Mahāyāna practitioners, it is conjoined with bodhicitta that seeks others' welfare.

4. On the basis of mindfulness, single-pointed *concentration* focused on the four truths is attained. In particular, this concentration focuses on the emptiness of true existence of all phenomena.

5. The faculty of *wisdom* is a single-pointed mind that realizes the four truths. From concentration comes the penetrative wisdom that individually discriminates the features and qualities of the four truths as well as their ultimate mode of existence. Bodhisattvas cultivate the wisdom that realizes all aspects of all phenomena — both their conventional and ultimate modes of existence.

The *Sūtra on the Ten Grounds* says (MMAB 51):

> The five powers are like this: (1) The power of faith abides in isolation, abides in detachment, abides in cessation, and is meditation directed toward thorough complete abandonment. (2) Similarly, the power of joyous effort ... (3) Similarly, the power of mindfulness ... (4) Similarly, the power of concentration ... (5) Similarly, the faculty of wisdom faith abides in isolation, abides in detachment, abides in cessation, and is meditation directed toward thorough complete abandonment.

The five faculties and the five powers have the same names and the same objects — the four truths — but the five powers are the stronger and fuller development of the five faculties. With the five faculties practitioners are unable to stop the discordant factors — nonfaith, laziness, forgetfulness, distraction, and ignorance or faulty wisdom — that may occasionally arise. However, with the five powers they have gained mastery over these five so that they can no longer manifest. The five powers are able to override, though not yet

fully abandon, any opposing factors. The power of faith has conquered the lack of faith in the four truths, the power of effort has overcome the three types of laziness that interrupt meditation on them, the power of mindfulness has counteracted forgetfulness of the aspects and objects of the four truths, the power of concentration has eliminated the five hindrances to concentration on the four truths, and wisdom has destroyed all misunderstandings and wrong conceptions about them.

According to the *Compendium of Knowledge*, the five faculties and five powers are also distinguished by the path in which they are foremost. The five faculties are emphasized during the first two stages of the path of preparation — heat and peak. Here the five discordant factors — nonfaith and so forth — do not arise during meditative equipoise but may manifest during subsequent attainment. The five powers are developed primarily in the third and fourth stages of the path of preparation — fortitude and supreme dharma. Here the five discordant factors also cannot arise during subsequent attainment.

Nāgārjuna encourages us to practice the five faculties and five powers:[129]

> With faith, effort, and mindfulness,
>
> concentration and wisdom — five in all,
>
> you must strive hard to reach the highest state:
>
> as powers, these faculties take you to the peak.

The Five Faculties and Five Powers: Pāli Tradition

The five faculties are explained in the *Connected Discourses on the Faculties* (SN 48) and the five powers in the *Connected Discourses on the Powers* (SN 50). The five faculties may be present in both ordinary beings and in those on a supramundane path. The wisdom faculty comprises both insight knowledge that knows the arising and passing away of things and path knowledge that directly experiences nirvāṇa. The knowledge of phenomena as impermanent, duḥkha in nature, and without a self is preliminary to the supramundane path. Path knowledge is the supramundane path. The five faculties and five powers reach fulfillment in nirvāṇa. Their explanations are similar to those in the Sanskrit tradition. In brief:

1. Faith has trust in the Three Jewels. The faculty of faith directs us to the path and keeps us on it even when we go through bouts of questioning, doubts, or strong afflictions.

2. Effort is an energetic mind. The faculty of effort combats and overpowers its opposites — laziness, heedlessness, unconscientiousness — and enables us to practice the four supreme strivings.

3. Mindfulness keeps us aware. As a faculty, in daily life it keeps us cognizant of what we are doing and remembers what to practice and abandon. In meditation, it remembers and focuses the mind on the object of meditation. In both situations, it prevents the mind from drifting away from what it should be paying attention to. It combats and overcomes forgetfulness, oblivion, and mental drifting.

4. Concentration keeps the mind focused one-pointedly on its chosen object and prevents distraction. As a faculty in serenity meditation, it keeps the mind one-pointedly on the meditation object; in insight meditation, it enables the mind to remain focused on whatever momentary phenomena in the body-mind complex it is examining without straying to other objects.

Mindfulness and concentration function in tandem yet can be differentiated. Mindfulness keeps the mind on what we are doing in daily life or on the meditation object by recollecting it. Concentration sustains the attention and unifies the mind so that it is one-pointed. Mindfulness counteracts forgetfulness, while concentration prevents distraction.

5. Wisdom correctly understands its object. As a faculty, it knows the three characteristics, correctly understands the four truths, and penetrates the unconditioned, nirvāṇa. It combats ignorance, confusion, and wrong views, and it examines, investigates, and analyzes conditioned phenomena to know their nature.

Although the five faculties are spoken of individually, in practice they function harmoniously together. They complement each other and cooperate to eliminate hindrances and obstacles, make the breakthrough[130] to the unconditioned, and attain nirvāṇa.

Since the five faculties influence one another, balancing them is important. Without balance, faith may become blind faith or devotion without understanding. Wisdom may slide into intellectual skill that has memorized texts and can debate well but lacks real feeling and receptivity toward the Buddha's message. When in balance, faith and wisdom bring realizations.

If effort and concentration are not balanced, effort may result in pushing ourselves, which makes the mind tense and stressed, whereas pseudoconcentration makes the mind too passive. We sit quietly and empty the mind, believing this is meditation when in fact we are not focused properly on a meditation object.

With mindfulness we can keep these two pairs properly balanced. Although the examples of imbalance above are coarse, imbalance may occur on more subtle levels as well.

These same five mental qualities become known as "powers" when they reach a degree of strength or power such that they cannot be dislodged by their opposites.

1. The power of faith cannot be overcome by doubt, skepticism, or disbelief.
2. The power of effort is not affected by laziness, procrastination, or discouragement.
3. The power of mindfulness cannot be harmed by forgetfulness.
4. The power of concentration is resistant to distraction and scattering.
5. The power of wisdom cannot be harmed by ignorance.

The five powers are developed in order to directly know and then abandon the five higher fetters — desire for existence in the form realm, desire for existence in the formless realm, conceit, restlessness, and ignorance. They also overlap with others of the thirty-seven harmonies with awakening (AN 5.15):

> Where, monastics, can the power of faith be seen? In the four factors of stream-entry (unshakable faith in Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha, and perfect ethical conduct).
>
> Where can the power of effort be seen? In the four right efforts.
>
> Where can the power of mindfulness be seen? In the four establishments of mindfulness.
>
> Where can the power of concentration be seen? In the four jhānas (dhyānas).
>
> Where can the power of wisdom be seen? In the four truths.

The five faculties and five powers are wonderful companions along the path.

REFLECTION

1. Review the functions of each of the five faculties and powers.
2. How can you generate and enhance them in your life?
3. What will help you to overcome their opposites — doubt, laziness, forgetfulness, distraction, and ignorance?

The Seven Awakening Factors

Regarding the seven awakening factors (*bodhyaṅga*, *bojjhaṅga*), the *Sūtra on the Ten Grounds* says (MMAB 51):

> The seven awakening factors are like this: (1) Correct mindfulness abides in isolation, abides in detachment, abides in cessation, and is meditation directed toward thorough complete abandonment. (2) Similarly, correct discrimination of phenomena ... (3) Similarly, correct effort ... (4) Similarly, correct joy ... (5) Similarly, correct pliancy (tranquility) ... (6) Similarly, correct concentration ... (7) Similarly, correct equanimity abides in isolation, abides in detachment, abides in cessation, and is meditation directed toward thorough complete abandonment.

The adjective "correct" indicates that these seven qualities are no longer qualities of an ordinary being but have been transformed into ārya paths. "Factors" indicates that they are causes of awakening.

Many qualities, such as mindfulness, effort, concentration, and wisdom, are included in several of the seven sets comprising the thirty-seven harmonies. For example, mindfulness is an establishment of mindfulness, a faculty, a power, an awakening factor, and a path factor. These are the same mindfulness, but at different stages of development, capacity, and potency.

1. The *mindfulness* (*smṛti*, *sati*) awakening factor enables us to control the afflictions. With it the mind is thoroughly familiar with the four truths and can remain focused on them without being distracted by other objects.

2. The awakening factor of *discrimination of phenomena* (*dharmapravicaya*, *dhamma vicaya*) directly realizes selflessness and thus destroys obscurations. It also clearly knows what to practice and what to abandon.

3. The *effort* (*vīrya*, *viriya*) awakening factor stabilizes renunciation, enabling us to attain awakening quickly.

4. The *joy* (*prīti*, *pīti*) awakening factor makes the mind continually happy, thus benefiting the body and mind.

5. The *pliancy* (*praśrabdhi*, *passaddhi*) awakening factor removes all mental and physical discomfort and unserviceability and makes the body and mind flexible, blissful, and capable of engaging in virtue. As an ārya's path, it is without affliction.

6. The *concentration* (*samādhi*) awakening factor abides single-pointedly on a chosen object of meditation, enabling us to fulfill all our wishes by developing awakened qualities.

In an ārya's continuum, it is without affliction, and when combined with wisdom, it abandons afflictions.

7. The *equanimity* (*upekṣā*, *upekkhā*) awakening factor enables us to adopt what is to be practiced and avoid what is to be abandoned. It is the mental factor, not the feeling, of equanimity. As the opposite of the unbalanced mind of afflictions, it enables the mind to be free from restlessness, laxity, and over- and underapplication of the antidotes.

The Seven Awakening Factors: Pāli Tradition

To give an example of how the seven awakening factors function as described in the *Mindfulness of Breathing Sutta* (MN 118): After describing the establishment of mindfulness on breathing, the Buddha shows that, when developed and cultivated, it fulfills the four establishments of mindfulness. He goes on to explain how the four establishments of mindfulness, when developed and cultivated, fulfill the seven awakening factors, and then how the seven awakening factors, when developed and cultivated, fulfill true knowledge and liberation.

The Buddha explains mindfulness of breathing in terms of sixteen aspects, which are organized into four groups of four. The four groups correspond to the four establishments of mindfulness.

Mindfulness of the body includes (1) breathing in and out long, (2) breathing in and out short, (3) experiencing the whole body, and (4) calming the body.

Mindfulness of feelings includes (1) joy, (2) bliss, (3) mental formations (feeling and discrimination), and (4) calming the mental formations.

Mindfulness of the mind includes (1) experiencing the mind, (2) gladdening the mind, (3) concentrating the mind, and (4) temporarily liberating the mind from hindrances.

Mindfulness of phenomena include (1) contemplating impermanence, (2) fading away, (3) cessation, and (4) relinquishment of the five hindrances by the seven awakening factors.

The first three groups apply mostly to the practice of concentration and serenity; the last group is the practice of insight. In this way, meditation on the sixteen aspects of breathing fulfills the four establishments of mindfulness.

In the *Four Establishments of Mindfulness Sutta* (DN 22), the Buddha spoke of mindfulness of breathing as only the first tetrad, making it one form of mindfulness of the body. In the *Mindfulness of Breathing Sutta*, he extended mindfulness of breathing to include all four establishments of mindfulness.

How can we be mindful of the breath and of the four aspects of feelings, mind, and phenomena at the same time? In practicing the latter three tetrads, the primary object of meditation is the feelings, mind, and phenomena, respectively. While contemplating the four aspects of each of these, the meditator maintains mindfulness of the breath in the background to stabilize the mind and make it tranquil and focused.

How does the cultivation of the four establishments of mindfulness fulfill the seven awakening factors? The Buddha explains:

1. When someone contemplates the body as a body, he arouses strong mindfulness, develops it, and brings it to fulfillment. This is the awakening factor of *mindfulness*.

2. Based on this, he investigates and examines bodily phenomena — such as the parts of his body — by means of the *discrimination of phenomena*, which is wisdom. For example,

he discerns the various bodily phenomena and observes their impermanence. Through continuous practice, he develops and fulfills the awakening factor of the discrimination of phenomena.

3. Probing with discrimination boosts his *effort* because the discrimination brings understanding that inspires deeper practice. In this way, the awakening factor of *effort* becomes strong and is fulfilled.

4. Effort leads to the experience of *joy*, which floods the body from head to toe. This joy is exhilarating but needs to be channeled properly so that he doesn't become attached to it or become arrogant, thinking he is special because of experiencing joy. Because the ecstasy of joy can be agitating, it must be refined and brought to fulfillment.

5. This leads to *pliancy* or tranquility of body and mind, the fifth awakening factor.

6. As pliancy is developed and brought to fulfillment, bliss increases. Together bliss and pliancy enable the mind to settle on the object with more stillness, deepening the awakening factor of *concentration*.

7. Now that concentration is firm, the meditator does not need strong effort to meditate and rests the mind in *equanimity*, the last awakening factor.

Up to this point, the invigorating factors of discrimination of phenomena, effort, and joy, which oppose lethargy and laxity, needed to be balanced with the calming factors of pliancy and concentration, which oppose restlessness. Mindfulness helps to balance these so the mind can remain in equanimity.

The meditator then practices mindfulness of the four aspects of feeling, mind, and phenomena while breathing. Progressing through the development and fulfillment of the seven awakening factors, he culminates each establishment of mindfulness by resting in equanimity in deep concentration.

How does he then employ the seven awakening factors to attain true knowledge (*vidyā*, *vijjā*) — clear and complete knowledge of the four truths — and liberation? The Buddha explains how these are attained (MN 118.42–43):

> A monastic develops the mindfulness awakening factor, which is supported by seclusion, dispassion, and cessation, and ripens in relinquishment. He develops the discrimination of phenomena awakening factor … the effort awakening factor … the joy awakening factor … the pliancy awakening factor … the concentration awakening factor, and the equanimity awakening factor, which is supported by seclusion, dispassion, and cessation, and ripens in relinquishment. This is how the seven awakening factors, developed and cultivated, fulfill true knowledge and liberation.

Now each awakening factor is cultivated and supported by seclusion, dispassion, and cessation, and ripens in relinquishment. Seclusion (*viveka*) is a simple lifestyle and a peaceful mind free from the five hindrances. Dispassion (*virāga*) is the fading away of sensual desire. Cessation (*nirodha*) is the eradication of defilements, and relinquishment (*vossagga*) is the abandonment of pollutants and entrance into nirvāṇa. The seven awakening factors are supported by these qualities in that on the early stages of the path the meditator's goal is to attain nirvāṇa by practicing them, and on the supramundane paths nirvāṇa is the object of meditation.

The awakening factors have now been developed to the point where they will culminate in full, profound knowledge of the four truths and liberation of the mind from

all defilements. Within equanimity, the meditator strengthens her discrimination of phenomena so that it becomes wisdom supported by single-pointed concentration. By investigating the nature of phenomena, especially the three characteristics, the meditator breaks through and perceives nirvāṇa.

Although the awakening factors reach prominence sequentially, they are present to some extent from the beginning of the practice. As each new awakening factor reaches prominence, the preceding ones are not necessarily relinquished. For example, mindfulness remains strong while all the other awakening factors are cultivated. In short, when the four establishments of mindfulness are practiced fully in the context of mindfulness of breathing, it leads to the development of the other six awakening factors. When all seven awakening factors have been properly cultivated and have completely matured, they culminate in the direct knowledge that brings liberation.

The seven awakening factors are so called because they lead to awakening, not because they constitute awakening or are present only in awakened beings (SN 46.5):

> They lead to awakening, therefore they are called factors of awakening. Here, one develops the awakening factor of mindfulness [discrimination of phenomena, effort, joy, pliancy, concentration, equanimity] that is based upon seclusion, dispassion, and cessation, maturing in release.

When the seven are consummated and found together, one is awakened due to having penetrated the four truths.

The Āryas' Eightfold Path

The āryas' eightfold path (*āryāṣṭāṅga mārga*, *ariya aṭṭhaṅgika magga*) consists of eight path factors. *The Sūtra on the Ten Grounds says* (MMAB 52):

> The eightfold path is like this: (1) right view abides in isolation, abides in detachment, abides in cessation, and is meditation directed toward thorough complete abandonment; (2) right intention ... ; (3) right speech ... ; (4) right action ... ; (5) right livelihood ... ; (6) right effort ... ; (7) right mindfulness ... ; (8) right concentration abides in isolation, abides in detachment, abides in cessation, and is meditation directed toward thorough complete abandonment.

Speaking of the eightfold path of āryas, Maitreya's *Differentiation of the Middle and the Extremes* says:

> One that thoroughly realizes,
>
> one that makes you understand,
>
> the three factors [that] make others develop trust,
>
> as antidotes to those on the opposite side —
>
> these are the eight factors of the path.

This verse shows the eight path factors classified into four branches as they pertain to bodhisattvas.

1. *One that thoroughly realizes* refers to right view, which realizes in postmeditation time the correct understanding of the four truths that was realized in meditative equipoise.

Right view is the *branch of affirmation* because it affirms the realization of emptiness that occurred during meditative equipoise.

2. *One that makes you understand* is right intention, the intention that wishes to correctly explain to others the view of selflessness we have realized in meditation. Right intention is the *branch of promoting understanding in others*.

3. *The three factors [that] make others develop trust* are right speech, action, and livelihood. *Right speech* is the speech that explains to others the right view we have realized. *Right action* refers to refraining from harmful physical deeds such as killing, stealing, and unwise and unkind sexual behavior. Right actions in these areas are pure and do not harm others or ourselves. *Right livelihood* is ways of procuring our requisites — food, shelter, clothing, and medicine — that are free from the five wrong livelihoods — hinting, flattery, bribery, coercion, and hypocrisy. These three are the *branch that develops trust and respect* in others' minds because others know our speech is truthful and kind, our actions are ethical, and our physical needs are modest.

4. *Antidotes to those on the opposite side* are right effort, mindfulness, and concentration. *Right effort* is making effort to develop the antidotes that eliminate the objects to be abandoned on the path of meditation. It overcomes unfavorable conditions, such as the innate afflictions, in order to advance to higher levels of the path. *Right mindfulness* does not forget the object of meditation and thus prevents and eliminates hindrances to single-pointedness, such as restlessness and laxity. *Right concentration* is the antidote to the obscuration to mental absorption — the unserviceability of the mind that hinders the development of concentration. By means of right concentration, we are able to cultivate the superknowledges and to focus on the meaning of the four truths single-pointedly. These three form the *branch of antidotes to the discordant class* because they overcome and purify obstructions.

As practices developed on the path of meditation, all eight path factors are exalted knowers (*jñāna*, T. *mkhyen pa*), which are mental qualities or paths. Although we sometimes say, "follow the path to awakening" as if "path" meant a series of steps, paths are realizing consciousnesses in the continuum of a practitioner. Because Prāsaṅgikas say physical and verbal actions can be form, they assert that right speech, action, and livelihood can be forms. For example, prātimokṣa precepts are ethical conduct and they are imperceptible forms.[131] According to those who do not accept prātimokṣa ethical restraints as imperceptible form, these three refer to knowers — mental states that intend to keep pure ethical conduct of speech, actions, and livelihood — not to the actual physical actions, speech, or means of procuring our livelihood themselves.

Integrating the Eightfold Path with Our Lives

While the eightfold path is usually spoken of as a supramundane path, I appreciate the perspective of the Pāli tradition in which we begin to practice it now, as ordinary beings. In doing so, it will guide our lives until we actually enter the path.

1. A healthy and well-lived life is based on *right view*; we understand that our actions affect others and have an ethical dimension that influences what we ourselves will experience. Understanding virtuous and nonvirtuous actions and being able to discern the difference between them is essential. As practitioners, we avoid the extremes of indulgence in materialism and in asceticism. Holding the Middle Way view, we keep our body healthy

by eating and sleeping an appropriate amount of time but not more than is needed. Since our body is useful for Dharma practice, we must care for it wisely without pampering it.

2. *Right intention* is one of renunciation — a balanced mind free from attachment — love (benevolence), and compassion (nonharmfulness). Those on the bodhisattva path cultivate bodhicitta.

3. *Right livelihood* entails receiving the requisites for life in an ethical way, unpolluted by corruption. Considering the number of scandals reported in the news and the damage that people in the financial, manufacturing, and business sectors can inflict on many lives, the benefit of earning a living in an ethical manner cannot be understated.

For monastics who are dependent on others for their food, clothing, shelter, and medicine, practicing right livelihood is essential. This entails abandoning the five wrong livelihoods: (1) Hinting is not asking directly for something we need but dropping hints. "You gave me a warm jacket last year. It has been very useful, but now it is worn out." (2) Flattery involves saying pleasant and sweet words to others with the intention of getting them to give us something. "You are an intelligent and generous disciple. Other teachers would like their students to be like you." (3) Bribery is giving someone a small gift so that they will feel obliged to give us a big one. "Please enjoy this Dharma book that I'm giving you." (4) Coercion is putting someone in a position where they cannot say no, or using our power to influence them to give us something. "All the other sponsors gave $100. How much would you like to give?" (5) Hypocrisy is pretending to have qualities that we do not have. Usually we sleep late and lounge around, but when our benefactor comes to visit, we awake early and do pujas.

When we receive donations from people with faith in the Dharma, we must use them appropriately, not to go to the movies, purchase articles we do not need, or buy luxury items. The *Heap of Ethical Conduct Sūtra* (*Śīlaskandhikā*) says:

> Monastics who have enjoyed donations out of faith, if [they use those donations for idle pleasures such as] watching elephant fights and so forth, it is wrong livelihood.

While elephant fighting is not the entertainment of choice nowadays, the point is valid: when we accept offerings given by those with faith, we have an obligation to use them in a way that accords with their faith — for example, to sustain our lives and increase our wholesome qualities.

For lay practitioners, right livelihood means earning our living honestly, without deceiving or lying to clients, customers, or the public and without cheating others by overcharging, embezzling, exploitation, and so on. Doing work that contributes to killing or harming others is discouraged — for example, making weapons and insecticides, publishing or selling pornography, selling alcoholic beverages or recreational drugs, or writing unnecessary prescriptions for addictive drugs. Carelessly throwing pollutants into the environment and not maintaining proper safety standards for employees, while not specifically wrong livelihood, should be abandoned. Although wrong livelihood is not different from unwholesome physical and mental actions, the Buddha listed it separately to emphasize its importance.

4–5. On the basis of right livelihood, we then practice *right speech* and *right action*. This includes abandoning the seven unwholesome actions of body and speech and practicing the seven virtuous ones.

6. With *right effort*, we enthusiastically establish a daily meditation practice and study the Dharma.

7–8. Employing *right mindfulness* and *right concentration*, we develop our practice, contemplating and meditating on whatever Dharma topics we are studying. As time goes on, we will engage in critical analysis on the ultimate mode of existence — emptiness — using proper thought and reasoning. This brings us around once more to cultivating *right view* free from the extremes of absolutism and nihilism.

The Eightfold Path: Pāli Tradition

In *The Great Forty Sutta* (MN 117), the Buddha discusses each of the eight path factors by first differentiating the wrong understanding of it to abandon from the right understanding of it to practice. Knowing this puts us on secure ground before even beginning to practice the eight.

Knowing the right path factor, we can then see its mundane (*loka*) and supramundane (*transcendental*, *lokottara*, *lokuttara*) aspects. The *mundane* aspect is together with the pollutants and exists in the mindstreams of those who have not attained any of the eight paths and fruits of stream-enterer, once-returner, nonreturner, and arhat. The mundane aspect is meritorious and leads to fortunate rebirths, but not to liberation. These are the path factors that we ordinary beings practice in our daily lives.

The *supramundane* path factors exist in the mindstreams of the eight ārya Saṅgha. These are free from the pollutants and lead to liberation. Because the path is a gradual one, we first cultivate the mundane path factors. When they are mature and serenity and insight are strong, then the eight supramundane path factors all manifest together in an instant during a state of samādhi on the unconditioned, nirvāṇa.

Wrong View

Wrong views are of many sorts: for example, believing that our actions have no ethical value, that our actions do not bring results, that there is no continuity of being and everything ends at the time of death, that other realms of rebirth do not exist, or that attaining liberation or full awakening are impossible because defilements inhere in the mind. Wrong view in this context is the same as the wrong views of the ten nonvirtues.

Many more wrong views exist; they are too numerous to list here. In fact, in our confusion, we human beings invent new ones in every generation. Nowadays, some people believe that killing their enemies brings a fortunate rebirth; that racial, ethnic, religious, and gender prejudices are based on correct cognizers; that ethical principles and societal laws do not apply to them; that human beings are inherently selfish so trying to become more compassionate is useless; and so on. When people use these views to validate their actions, great suffering ensues.

Right View

> What is right view? Knowledge of dukkha, knowledge of the origin of dukkha, knowledge of the cessation of dukkha, knowledge of the way leading to the cessation of dukkha.[132]

Right views are of two types: mundane and supramundane right views. *Mundane right views* are the opposite of the wrong views mentioned above. We believe that our actions have an ethical dimension and bring results, that there is a continuity of being after death, that caring for others has spiritual benefit, that holy beings who have actualized the path

exist, and so on. Mundane right view understands the functioning of the law of karma and its effects.

Mundane right views also understand what each of the other path factors are and are not. Without being able to differentiate right intention from wrong intention, right speech from wrong speech, and so on, we will not know what to practice and what to abandon, and our Dharma practice will be a mass of confusion. Hearing teachings, studying, and discussions with wise Dharma friends will help us arrive at the right view that is so essential to begin and continue on the Buddha's path. Although mundane right views are in the mindstreams of those affected by the pollutants, they lead to fortunate rebirths.

Mundane right views are also views concordant with the supramundane right view. These are the conceptual or intellectual right views of the four truths by someone who has not yet penetrated the four truths or had an experience of nirvāṇa. Conceptual understanding is important; it is what gets us going on the path. When cultivated diligently, it will lead to direct realization. However, being conceptual and lacking the deep experience of āryas, conceptual understanding is not stable. Because our wisdom is not fine-tuned, there is the chance that we will be swayed by another teacher or teaching. Thus it's important to continually reinforce our understanding of the right view of the four truths through study, discussion with serious Dharma students, and meditation.

Supramundane right views are the right views in the mind of one who has eliminated any or all of the pollutants and fetters. The supramundane right views are the direct penetration of the four truths as well as direct knowledge of nirvāṇa. They comprise the faculty of wisdom, the power of wisdom, the discrimination of phenomena awakening factor, and the path factor of right view in the mindstreams of āryas.

Supramundane paths penetrate the four truths and have nirvāṇa as their object.[133] Although stream-enterers have pollutants and fetters, they also possess supramundane consciousnesses when they experience the breakthrough that directly perceives nirvāṇa. The supramundane path factors are those present in a mind moment that is supramundane, a mind moment that perceives nirvāṇa. It is at that time that right view and the other seven become actual path factors. In short, supramundane consciousnesses are the path and the fruit consciousnesses of the four āryas, but not all the consciousnesses in their mindstreams are supramundane.

At the time of breakthrough to nirvāṇa — which occurs whenever āryas directly realize nirvāṇa, which is the object of their meditation — all eight path factors are present simultaneously in the mind. These are the supramundane eightfold path. At this time, right view is the wisdom seeing nirvāṇa. Right intention fixes the mind on nirvāṇa, directing the mind to and absorbing it in nirvāṇa. Right speech, right action, and right livelihood are the desisting from their opposites that occurs when the mind apprehends nirvāṇa. They are also the mental factors of nonattachment and so on that are now fully developed in the mind that experiences breakthrough to the truth. Right effort is the effort that penetrates the truth of the Dharma, right mindfulness attends to and is mindful of this truth, and right concentration is the unification of the mind in that experience. It is by the gradual strengthening of the eight factors of the mundane eightfold path that the supramundane eightfold path comes about in a momentary breakthrough to nirvāṇa that eradicates a portion of the afflictions.

Each of the eight mundane factors is meritorious and leads to a fortunate rebirth as well as good circumstances while we are born in saṃsāra. They lead to the end of duḥkha, but not directly because they lack the power to eradicate the defilements from their root.

They lead to nirvāṇa by eventually becoming strong enough to give rise to the supramundane path factors.

Wrong Intention

Wrong intentions are those of sensual desire, malice, and cruelty.

Right Intention

> What is right intention? Intention of renunciation, intention of nonmalice, intention of harmlessness.

Mundane right intentions are affected by attachment but nevertheless create merit. They include the intentions of renunciation, nonmalice, and compassion (noncruelty, *ahimsa*). Renunciation in this context is a balanced mind free from attachment to sense objects. Noncruelty is compassion and nonviolence, the principle that Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King used as the foundation of their actions and the social movements that sprung from them. I have great respect for all those people who compassionately work to improve the world through nonviolent actions. With right intention, we live our daily lives and share our knowledge and realizations with others. Right intention also spurs us to have right speech, action, and livelihood.

Supramundane right intention is the "thinking, thought, intention, mental absorption, mental fixity, directing of mind, verbal formation in an ariya's mind" (MN 117:14). "Thinking" and "thought" refer to investigation (*vitarka*, *vitakka*), which contributes to attaining meditative absorption by directing and fixing the mind on the meditation object.[134]

Wrong Speech

Wrong speech is the four nonvirtues of speech: lying, divisive speech, harsh speech, and idle talk.

Right Speech

> What is right speech? Abstinence from false speech, abstinence from divisive speech, abstinence from harsh speech, abstinence from idle talk.

Mundane right speech is speech that is meritorious and abstains from the four types of wrong speech. This is the right speech of the ten virtues — speech that is truthful, harmonious, gentle, wise, kind, and appropriate. It is clear so that others understand our meaning, and it prevents discord, creates harmony, and is in accord with the Dharma. Right speech, action, and livelihood pertain to the higher training in ethical conduct.

Our speech is a powerful instrument with which we can create peace and harmony or conflict and pain. The Buddha mentions five points to be mindful of when we speak (MN 21:11):

1. Speak at the right time, when others are not occupied in another activity and have time to converse. For example, if we want to speak with a friend about their inappropriate behavior, we should speak privately, not in front of others where they will be embarrassed.
2. Speak what is true; do not spread rumors when you cannot verify the information. For example, when we have not asked someone what his motivation was for an action he did, we should not impute an intention that may be false.

3. Speak gently, choosing suitable words that express your intention. If we simply blurt out what we think or feel, accusing others of being the source of our unhappiness, hurt feelings and an argument are almost assured.
4. Speak with a beneficial underlying purpose, not with the wish to cause harm.
5. Speak with loving-kindness. Take a few moments — or a few minutes — to observe and calm your mind and generate a kind motivation before speaking.

Although we can improve how we speak to others, we cannot control how they speak to us. The Buddha advises us (MN 21:11):

> There are these five courses of speech that others may use when they address you: their speech may be timely or untimely, true or untrue, gentle or harsh, connected with good or with harm, spoken with a mind of loving-kindness or with inner hate ... you should train thus: "Our minds will remain unaffected, and we shall utter no nasty words; we shall abide with compassion for their welfare, with a mind of loving-kindness, without inner hate."

Having restrained our minds from proliferating with hateful thoughts, we then generate loving-kindness for the person who spoke to us. We then spread our loving-kindness to all beings throughout the universe. Although it may not be easy, if we train our minds in this way day by day, our anger will subside and our responses will follow suit. In this way, we contribute to world peace, and over time we will notice that all of our relationships have improved.

In the midst of a difficult situation, figuring out what is right speech can be challenging, especially when there are many factors to consider. What we say may be true or false, beneficial or unbeneficial, and agreeable or disagreeable. With which combinations of these six qualities is it suitable to speak? The Buddha gives us some wise pointers by describing when the Tathāgata speaks (MN 58):

1. If the speech is false, not beneficial, and disagreeable, he does not utter it. What counts against this speech is that it is false and not beneficial.
2. If the speech is true, not beneficial, and disagreeable, he does not say it. Even though the words are true, because the speech has no benefit there is no reason to say it.
3. If the speech is true, beneficial, and disagreeable, the Buddha will say it at the appropriate time. The important factors are that it is true and beneficial. Sometimes to correct people who are stubborn or unruly, the Buddha had to speak to them sternly. For example, there was a group of six monks who were very naughty, and the Buddha had to say words that were unpleasant to their ears to help them. This is done for their long-term benefit and to protect the Dharma and Vinaya so that they will last a long time.
4. If the speech is false, not beneficial, and agreeable, it also should not be said. Flattery and nice stories may please someone's ego, but they have no value because they are false and lack benefit.
5. If the speech is true, not beneficial, and agreeable, it should not be spoken.
6. If the speech is true, beneficial, and agreeable, the Buddha will say it at the proper time.

In short, compassion and benefit are the yardstick by which to measure the value of our speech and all other actions as well. While our intention should always be benevolent, the words we use to express ourselves should be according to the listener's aptitude, personality, and culture.

Mundane right speech, action, and right livelihood are not unique to Buddhism. They are taught by all great spiritual leaders and all those who promote ethical behavior. Mundane right speech and right action are the seven virtuous actions of body and speech that are the opposite of the seven nonvirtuous ones.

Supramundane right speech is restraint from the four kinds of wrong speech in an ārya's mind.

Wrong Action

Wrong action centers on killing sentient beings, stealing, and unwise or unkind sexual behavior.

Right Action

> What is right action? Abstinence from the destruction of life, abstinence from taking what is not given, and abstinence from unwise sexual behavior.

Mundane right action involves abandoning the three destructive physical actions — killing, stealing, and unwise sexual behavior and using our physical energy to preserve life, protect others' possessions, and preserve marital harmony. For lay practitioners, it entails using sexuality wisely and kindly; for monastics it involves celibacy.

Supramundane right action is the restraining and abandoning of the three wrong actions done by an ārya.

Wrong Livelihood

Wrong livelihood for monastics includes scheming, flattering, hinting, belittling, and giving someone a small gift in the hope of receiving a larger one. For lay practitioners, it includes harmful ways of earning a living, such as manufacturing weapons or poisons; working in the armaments industry; killing livestock; operating a casino; or making, selling, or serving intoxicating substances. Wrong livelihood also includes lying to and cheating customers and clients, denying that your business practices adversely affect the environment, putting other people's investments at risk, false advertising, and so forth.

Right Livelihood

> What is right livelihood? Here an ariya disciple, having abandoned a wrong mode of livelihood, earns his living by a right livelihood.

Mundane right livelihood is avoiding all forms of wrong livelihood and earning our livelihood in nonharmful and honest ways. Lay practitioners should engage in work that does not damage others and, if possible, seek work that contributes to the healthy functioning of society and the welfare of others.

Right livelihood is having a lifestyle free from the two extremes of asceticism and luxury. Of course, we can enjoy the basic necessities of life, but it is important not to have or use more than what we actually need. A sense of contentment is essential.

Supramundane right livelihood is the abandonment of all wrong livelihood by āryas.

An example of right speech, action, and livelihood functioning together is a teacher who instructs her students in a gentle way with the intention to benefit them. She sets a

good example for them through her own nonharmful actions and truthful, kind speech. As a monastic, she is content and lives a simple lifestyle and speaks of others' good qualities, not advertising their faults.

Abandoning intoxicants is not included in the three ethical factors of right speech, action, and livelihood. However, if we are to cultivate these three mundane virtues, let alone their supramundane forms, abandoning intoxicants is essential. Why? Mindfulness is difficult to cultivate even when the mind is clear; how much more so when the mind is intoxicated and our ethical restraints are lax.

Right Effort

> What is right effort? Here a monastic generates desire for the nonarising of unarisen nonvirtuous states; he makes an effort, arouses energy, applies his mind, and strives. He generates desire for the abandoning of arisen nonvirtuous states … He generates desire for the arising of unarisen virtuous states … He generates desire for the maintenance of arisen virtuous states, for their nondecay, increase, expansion, and fulfillment by development; he makes an effort, arouses energy, applies his mind, and strives.

Mundane right effort is the four supreme strivings: effort to prevent the arising of nonvirtues, to abandon nonvirtues that have arisen, to cultivate new virtues, and to maintain and enhance virtues that are already present. With right effort we direct our energy away from harmful mental, verbal, and physical actions to the development of beneficial thoughts, words, and deeds, and make every effort to live a nonviolent and compassionate life. Right effort enables us to abandon the five hindrances and attain all realizations. Through right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration, the higher training in concentration is accomplished.

Supramundane right effort is the effort present with the other path factors at the time of realizing nirvāṇa.

Right Mindfulness

> What is right mindfulness? Here a monastic dwells contemplating the body in the body, ardent, introspectively aware, mindful, having removed longing and displeasure for the world. She dwells contemplating feelings in feelings … She dwells contemplating mind in mind … She dwells contemplating phenomena in phenomena, ardent, introspectively aware, mindful, having removed longing and displeasure for the world.

Mundane right mindfulness is the four establishments of mindfulness. In daily life right mindfulness remembers our precepts and ethical values. In meditation right mindfulness attends to phenomena, enabling us to discern their distinct characteristics, relationships, and qualities. In a highly concentrated mind right mindfulness leads to insight and wisdom.

Supramundane right mindfulness is the mindfulness present with the other path factors at the time of realizing nirvāṇa.

Right Concentration

> What is right concentration? Herein, secluded from sense pleasures, secluded from nonvirtuous states, a monastic enters and dwells in the first jhāna, which is accompanied by investigation and analysis and filled with joy and bliss born of seclusion. Then with the subsiding of investigation and analysis, by gaining

> inner confidence and mental unification, he enters and dwells in the second jhāna, which is free from investigation and analysis but is filled with joy and bliss born of concentration. With the fading of joy, he dwells in equanimity, mindful and clearly comprehending, and experiencing bliss with the body he enters and dwells in the third jhāna, of which the ariyas declare: "He is equanimous, mindful, one who dwells happily." With the abandoning of pleasure and pain and with the previous disappearance of joy and displeasure, he enters and dwells in the fourth jhāna, which has neither-pleasure-nor-pain and purity of mindfulness due to equanimity.

Mundane right concentration is the four dhyānas. Concentration directed toward liberation investigates the nature of phenomena with mindfulness. For beginners on the path, right concentration involves gradually developing meditative abilities in our daily meditation practice.

Supramundane right concentration is the four dhyānas that are conjoined with wisdom and the other path factors at the time of perceiving nirvāṇa. The supramundane path is a right concentration. In it, all eight path factors are present simultaneously, each performing its own function. Right concentration leads to right knowledge and right liberation. Right knowledge is reviewing knowledge that reviews the experience of liberation. It is knowledge that the mind is fully liberated from the pollutants.

After explaining each of the eight factors, the Buddha describes how right view, right effort, and right mindfulness circle around each factor. Right view of each factor is necessary to ensure we understand it correctly, right effort invigorates and develops our practice of each factor, and right mindfulness practices each factor by focusing on it in a proper way. For example, for right speech, actions, and livelihood to be aspects of the mundane eightfold path, they must be accompanied by right view, undertaken with right effort, and sustained by right mindfulness.

REFLECTION

1. Review the wrong aspect of each path factor that is to be abandoned. Reflect if it is present in your mind and behavior. Make examples from your life.
2. Think of antidotes to help you release that attitude or behavior. Imagine practicing them in situations that you are likely to encounter.
3. Review the right mundane aspect of each path factor. Rejoice at times when that has arisen in you. Contemplate how to increase it in your life.
4. Review the right supramundane aspect of each path factor. Imagine what it would be like to have that in your mindstream, as the way you naturally think and act. Aspire to cultivate the path factors and perfect them in this way.

Relationships among the Thirty-Seven Harmonies with Awakening

The seven sets that comprise the thirty-seven harmonies are intertwined. They are not separate qualities or practices that are to be cultivated on different occasions. Among the seven sets, the eightfold path is broader than the others because it specifically discusses ethical conduct while the other sets pertain more to cultivating concentration and wisdom.

The path factors of right view and right intention are associated with wisdom. At the beginning of our practice they help us to develop the Buddhist worldview by means of learning and thinking about the Dharma. This conceptual right view sets the stage for all the practices that follow. Right intention follows upon that, indicating that to practice properly an attitude of benevolence, renunciation, and nonharming is necessary as we live within the Buddhist worldview. At this early stage, right view and right intention are not at the level to be considered either the faculty or the power of wisdom.

The eightfold path is undertaken with faith and confidence. Gaining the right view increases our confidence in the Three Jewels. With the faculty of faith, we cultivate right intention and undertake the practices of right speech, right action, and right livelihood. The faculty of faith also inspires us to begin training our mind in earnest.

At this point the path factors of right effort and right mindfulness come in as effort is needed to practice mindfulness. This brings in the faculty of effort and the faculty of mindfulness. The faculty of effort involves the four supreme strivings, which influence how we practice all eight path factors. The faculty of effort links to the power of effort and the base of spiritual power that is concentration brought about through effort. Right mindfulness is the four establishments of mindfulness, which link with the faculty of mindfulness, the power of mindfulness, and the mindfulness awakening factor.

This deep practice of effort and mindfulness leads to the awakening factors of joy and concentration, which are also the path factor of right concentration and the essence of the four bases for spiritual power. To the extent that effort, mindfulness, and concentration are unshakable by their opposites, they become the powers of effort, mindfulness, and concentration.

Once right concentration is stable, it is used to examine the nature of phenomena, the twelve links of dependent origination, the four truths, the five aggregates, the six sources, and so on. Here the awakening factor of discrimination of phenomena comes in as meditation is undertaken in order to see the three characteristics of impermanence, unsatisfactory nature, and no-self. The effort awakening factor and the power of effort enable wisdom to deepen. This leads to penetration of the four truths, which is the path factor of higher right view and the faculty of wisdom and the power of wisdom, which are supported by the other faculties and powers. Please contemplate the thirty-seven harmonies yourself and see other ways in which they are interrelated and complement one another. This will enable you to practice them in a seamless, appropriate, and noncontradictory way.

Many of the same mental factors appear repeatedly in the thirty-seven harmonies, emphasizing the vital role they play in the path to liberation. The fact that they are found in different contexts and sets illustrates not only the various situations in which they are needed but also how they progress and develop as a practitioner advances.

Occurrences of Mental Factors in the Seven Sets of Harmonies with Awakening

MENTAL FACTOR	ESTABLISHMENTS OF MINDFULNESS	SUPREME STRIVINGS	BASES OF SPIRITUAL POWER	FACULTIES	POWERS	AWAKENING FACTORS	EIGHTFOLD PATH	TOTAL
Mindfulness	4			1	1	1	1	8
Effort		4	1	1	1	1	1	9
Concentration			4	1	1	1	1	8
Wisdom			1	1	1	1	1	5
Faith				1	1			2
Aspiration			1					1
Intention			1				1	2
Joy						1		1
Pliancy						1		1
Equanimity						1		1

The Thirty-Seven Harmonies and the Five Paths

In general, a path is a consciousness that is conjoined with uncontrived renunciation of saṃsāra. When speaking of the Mahāyāna or bodhisattva path, it is a consciousness conjoined with both renunciation and bodhicitta. In other contexts we may speak of "practicing the path," where "path" connotes a spiritual journey. But here, a path is a pristine wisdom, a consciousness with Dharma realizations.

The mantra in the *Heart Sūtra* — *tayata gate gate paragate parasamgate bodhi svaha* — outlines the five paths that lead to awakening. In terms of the Mahāyāna, the first *gate* refers to the path of accumulation. This bodhisattva path begins when practitioners have stable, unfabricated bodhicitta. The second *gate* indicates the path of preparation. Bodhisattvas enter this path when they attain the union of serenity and insight on the emptiness of inherent existence. *Paragate* indicates the path of seeing, which commences when bodhisattvas first realize emptiness directly and nonconceptually. Here they abandon all acquired afflictions. *Parasamgate* refers to the path of meditation, on which bodhisattvas progressively eradicate innate afflictions as well as cognitive obscurations. *Bodhi* refers to the path of no-more-learning — that is, full awakening or buddhahood — when all obscurations whatsoever have been eradicated and all excellent qualities developed to their utmost. Excluding the path of no-more-learning, the first four learning paths can be correlated with the thirty-seven harmonies, the practice that results in the path of no-more-learning.

The *Treasury of Knowledge* by Vasubandhu and the *Compendium of Knowledge* by his brother Asaṅga present different ways of correlating the thirty-seven harmonies with the five paths. Before describing that, I would like to share with you a story about these two remarkable brothers, both of whom made great contributions to the Nālandā tradition.

Asaṅga was the elder brother. A follower of the Mahāyāna, he wrote many texts according to the Cittamātra viewpoint, although it was said that he himself actually held Madhyamaka tenets. His younger brother Vasubandhu was an advocate of the Vaibhāṣika tenets and was very critical of his brother following the Mahāyāna. Asaṅga spent twelve years meditating in the wilderness. Through developing incredible fortitude and compassion, he had a vision of Maitreya, who took him to the Tusita pure land and taught him five Mahāyāna treatises, which Asaṅga then brought to Earth. Commenting on his brother's retreat, Vasubandhu sarcastically said, "My brother Asaṅga was unsuccessful in accomplishing any spiritual realization during his twelve years of retreat. Instead, he left the cave with a huge stack of commentaries that even an elephant couldn't carry!"

Later on Vasubandhu read one of Asaṅga's texts, where he first learned about great compassion, bodhicitta, and the six perfections. This caused him to think, "Great compassion and bodhicitta are excellent, and the Mahāyāna is quite rich in Dharma." Previously he had thought there was little difference between buddhahood and arhatship, but in a later part of Asaṅga's text, he learned of the ten powers of the Buddha as well as the eighteen distinctive qualities of buddhas from the Mahāyāna perspective. This made him reflect, "Not only are the causes — bodhicitta and the perfections — explained in the Mahāyāna so noble, but the result is wonderful as well. Buddhas have many more excellent qualities than arhats." He then felt deep regret for the criticism he had heaped on his brother and on the Mahāyāna teachings. In despair, he thought to cut out his tongue with which he had uttered such calumny. But then a sign came that said, "Don't do that. Cutting out your tongue is silly. You can use that same tongue to propagate the Mahāyāna teachings." Inspired, Vasubandhu wrote many commentaries to Mahāyāna sūtras, such as *Twenty Stanzas* (*Viṃśatikā*) and *Thirty Stanzas* (*Triṃśikā*), both from the Cittamātrin viewpoint.

The following chart illustrates the ways Vasubandhu and Asaṅga correlated the thirty-seven harmonies with the five paths. It applies to practitioners of all three vehicles.

Correlation of the Thirty-Seven Harmonies with the Five Paths.

PRACTICE	PATH ACCORDING TO VASUBANDHU'S TREASURY OF KNOWLEDGE	PATH ACCORDING TO ASAṄGA'S COMPENDIUM OF KNOWLEDGE
Four establishments of mindfulness	Path of accumulation	Small stage of the path of accumulation
Four supreme strivings	Heat stage of the path of preparation	Medium stage of the path of accumulation
Four bases of spiritual power	Peak stage of the path of preparation	Great stage of the path of accumulation
Five faculties	Fortitude stage of the path of preparation	Heat and peak stages of the path of preparation
Five powers	Supreme dharma stage of the path of preparation	Fortitude and supreme dharma stages of the path of preparation
Seven awakening factors	Path of meditation	Path of seeing
Eightfold path	Path of seeing	Path of meditation

By cultivating the four establishments of mindfulness and reflecting on their specific and common characteristics, we will understand the four seals: (1) all conditioned phenomena are impermanent, (2) all polluted phenomena are in the nature of duḥkha, (3) all phenomena are empty and selfless, and (4) nirvāṇa is true peace.[135] Having understood these, especially that nirvāṇa is peace, we will want to engage in the practice to attain nirvāṇa. This leads to practicing the four supreme strivings, which are the nature of joyous effort. Through putting forth effort, we will develop concentration, which is the essence of the four bases of spiritual power. If we have not attained serenity prior to entering the path of accumulation, we do so at this point.

Then, on the path of preparation, we put special attention on the five faculties and five powers in order to overcome all unfavorable conditions and to continue our meditation with the union of serenity and insight on selflessness. Concentration and insight may be either mundane or supramundane. In Buddhism, they are done for a special purpose — to attain nirvāṇa. The seven awakening factors and the eightfold path are then cultivated to bring this about.

Here, these seven sets are spoken of as qualities cultivated by practitioners on the four paths of accumulation, preparation, seeing, and meditation, not with regard to someone who has yet to enter a path. Some sūtras explain the thirty-seven harmonies for those who have yet to enter a path, such as us ordinary beings. The eightfold path is especially effective for us because the eight path factors are subsumed in the essential practice of the three higher trainings: right view and right intention are included in the higher training in wisdom; right action, speech, and livelihood are related to the higher training in ethical conduct; and right mindfulness, concentration, and effort pertain to the higher training of concentration. This way of speaking of the eight gives us ordinary beings clear and easy-to-understand directions about how to practice the Dharma in daily life.

Correlating the seven sets with specific paths does not mean that practitioners on previous or future stages of the path do not practice them. For example, the four

establishments of mindfulness are practiced before we enter a path and throughout the five paths. They become prominent and reach a certain stage of mastery on the path of accumulation, and for that reason are correlated with that path. The thirty-seven harmonies are correlated with the fourth bodhisattva ground, where bodhisattvas gain extraordinary expertise in the wisdom of the coarse and subtle thirty-seven harmonies. However, these thirty-seven are also practiced on earlier and later stages of the path. In short, avoid understanding correlations as solid relationships. It is helpful to remember that categories are flexible and are designated by our conceptual minds.

Conventional and Ultimate Thirty-Seven Harmonies

The thirty-seven harmonies with awakening must be understood and meditated on in terms of their conventional nature and ultimate nature. The conventional nature is as explained above; for example, in terms of the four establishments of mindfulness, we understand the body is unclean, feelings are unsatisfactory in nature, the mind is impermanent, and particular phenomena are to be practiced or abandoned on the path. Through examining their conventional nature, we understand the relationships among the thirty-seven factors, their functions in bringing about liberation, and their causes and results. Such investigation gives us an expansive understanding of their role on the path.

Meditating on their ultimate nature is seeing that they lack inherent existence. Maitreya in the first chapter of his *Ornament of Clear Realizations* speaks of this. Here the thirty-seven harmonies are seen as meditation objects, not as practices to cultivate, and with wisdom analyzing the ultimate nature, we investigate their deeper mode of being. Although they appear to have an inherent nature, when searched for, a fixed, independent nature cannot be found. They appear one way but exist in another. Reflecting on the emptiness of inherent existence of the meditations, realizations, and qualities we cultivate is extremely powerful because it prevents us from reifying the very paths that liberate us. In addition to meditating that the thirty-seven harmonies are empty of inherent existence, we reflect that likewise the I — the person cultivating them — and the awakening to which they lead lack inherent existence.

The Thirty-Seven Harmonies for Fundamental Vehicle and Mahāyāna Practitioners

The terms “Fundamental Vehicle” and “Mahāyāna” can be used with respect to one’s tenet system or one’s spiritual goal. According to tenet system, Vaibhāṣika and Sautrāntika are Fundamental Vehicle systems and Cittamātra and Madhyamaka are Mahāyāna systems. According to spiritual aim, practitioners who seek liberation from saṃsāra and want to become arhats are Fundamental Vehicle practitioners — śrāvakas and solitary realizers. Practitioners seeking full awakening in order to benefit all beings are Mahāyāna and follow the bodhisattva path.

A Fundamental Vehicle practitioner may be a proponent of either a Fundamental Vehicle or Mahāyāna tenet system. Similarly, a Mahāyāna practitioner may be a proponent of either a Fundamental Vehicle or a Mahāyāna tenet system. For example, Joe aspires for full awakening and therefore is a Mahāyāna practitioner. But since he follows the Vaibhāṣika tenet system, he is Fundamental Vehicle by tenet. Mary aspires to become an arhat, but is Madhyamaka by tenet. The thirty-seven harmonies are practices common to

Fundamental Vehicle practitioners — śrāvakas and solitary realizers — and to Mahāyāna practitioners — bodhisattvas. They are explained in both the Pāli and Sanskrit sūtras and commentaries. Although most Buddhist practitioners meditate on the thirty-seven harmonies, individuals may differ in terms of their motivation — whether they seek arhatship or buddhahood — and in terms of the tenet system and view of selflessness that they hold.

The thirty-seven harmonies easily blend into the lamrim, or stages of the path. The purpose of practicing the thirty-seven harmonies in the Pāli tradition is to realize with correct wisdom the three characteristics: impermanence, duḥkha, and no-self (selflessness). The lamrim teachings are geared toward generating these same three understandings, in addition to bodhicitta.

Dharmakīrti said, "From impermanence, duḥkha. From duḥkha, selflessness." That is, first we understand impermanence — the constantly changing nature of our mind and body and of our self. We are transitory by nature because we are governed by a multiplicity of causes and conditions that will change. We know that even if we feel strong and vibrant now, later we'll lose our strength. While many of the changes we undergo result from causes and conditions in the external environment, many more occur under the influence of our afflictions and karma. This state of being under the influence of these polluted conditions without a moment's respite is duḥkha — unsatisfactory.

Investigating further, we find that our body and mind being both impermanent and the nature of duḥkha is due to their dependence on other factors. As saṃsāric beings, we are under the power of other factors. Since that is so, we cannot be independent beings that exist under our own power. This leads us to understand selflessness, the lack of inherent existence. We depend on causes and conditions, we depend on the parts that compose us, and we depend on being designated by terms and concepts. We are empty of any existence from our own side and are not self-enclosed independent entities.

By meditating on the mindfulness of the body, we understand what it means to be an embodied being, one who is involuntarily trapped within a body that is impermanent, unsatisfactory in nature, and composed of thirty-two substances that are disgusting when seen for what they are. In mindfulness of feelings, we see how reactive, and thus unfree, we are with respect to our feelings and experiences. These and other insights arising from the practices of the four establishments of mindfulness lead us to generate renunciation — the aspiration to be free from saṃsāra and attain liberation. By meditating on the four establishments of mindfulness regarding others, we understand that they are similarly trapped by afflictions and karma and, with a compassionate attitude, we want them to be free and are willing to act in order to bring this about. This great compassion is an indispensable cause of bodhicitta.

Meditation on the third characteristic, selflessness, in the context of the Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka view of emptiness, involves seeing all phenomena — the thirty-seven harmonies, the four truths, all sentient beings, and so forth — as empty of existing from their own side and thus existing by mere designation. When combined with great compassion, this view of emptiness leads to the "compassion observing the unapprehendable" that Candrakīrti mentions in the homage in his *Supplement*. This compassion is so called because it is informed by an understanding of emptiness — here unapprehendable means emptiness. It demonstrates that we have compassion for sentient beings that are empty yet exist dependently.

The four supreme strivings relate to the practice of karma and its results as described in the lamrim texts. We can also practice these in terms of abiding in bodhisattva and tantric ethical codes as well. The four bases of spiritual power relate to the development of serenity and the dhyānas. These states of concentration can then be applied to gaining the superknowledges that Atiśa praises in *Lamp of the Path* as essential for completing the collections of merit and wisdom and for compassionately working for the benefit of sentient beings.

The qualities mentioned in the five faculties, five powers, seven awakening factors, and eightfold path are applicable to all practitioners, whether they follow the Fundamental Vehicle, the general Mahāyāna, or the Tantrayāna.

The *Sūtra on the Ten Grounds* explains the ten aims of bodhisattvas' practice of the thirty-seven harmonies with awakening: to refrain from forsaking all beings; to be sustained by their original unshakable resolve; to make great compassion foremost; to perfect the great kindness; to reflect on and bear in mind the cognition of all-knowledge; to completely accomplish the adornment of buddha lands; to completely realize the Tathāgata's powers, fearlessnesses, unique qualities, signs, marks, and speech; to further their quest, to acquire the most special supreme path; to accord with what they have learned regarding the extremely profound liberation of the Buddha; and to reflect on greatly wise and good skillful means.[136] Contemplating the expansive and beneficial results of completing these thirty-seven practices inspires us to engage in them.

The Thirty-Seven Harmonies in Tibetan Buddhism

The thirty-seven harmonies form the foundation practice for Buddhist practitioners of the three vehicles. Why, then, aren't they described in the lamrim texts on which Tibetan Buddhists base their practice? I (Chodron) asked His Holiness this, and his response clarified the role of lamrim studies, the philosophical studies done in the large monasteries, and Tantra: While the thirty-seven harmonies are not explicitly found in the lamrim texts, they are taught extensively in the *Pharchin* texts — the commentaries on Perfection of Wisdom sūtras — such as Maitreya's *Ornament of Clear Realizations*. Students also study them when learning Candrakīrti's *Supplement to the Middle Way* and Tsongkhapa's commentary on it, *Illuminating the Thought*.

The way one traverses the ten bodhisattva grounds in Tantra is slightly different than in Sūtra. One reason has to do with speed: due to Tantra's special way of combining wisdom and method, tantric practitioners can accumulate merit very rapidly once they enter the first of the five paths, making their progress through the ten bodhisattva grounds quicker. Another is that the paths, the main practices done on them, and the demarcation lines between the paths differ in Sūtrayāna and Tantrayāna. This could be one reason why the practice of the thirty-seven harmonies, which is essential for a bodhisattva following Sūtrayāna, is not explained in depth for someone practicing lamrim as preparation for tantric practice.

However, this does not mean that a lamrim practitioner does not need to practice the thirty-seven harmonies. Tsongkhapa's presentations of lamrim, especially his *Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path* and his *Middling Lamrim*, seem to be directed especially at people who have already studied the Perfections and the Middle Way. These lamrim texts synthesize what those practitioners have already learned, which includes the thirty-seven harmonies. Tsongkhapa's direct disciples were great scholars and geshes, so it seems that he

took it for granted that they already knew how to practice the thirty-seven harmonies. Since lamrim was given as a summary before entering Tantrayāna practice, such practitioners would already have cultivated the thirty-seven harmonies.

Such a qualified tantric practitioner must know the thirty-seven harmonies. In the visualization practice of the deity and the maṇḍala, specific correlations are made with the thirty-seven harmonies. For example, when speaking of the symbolism of Yamāntaka's body, the nine faces represent the nine scriptural categories, which set forth the teachings. The two horns symbolize the two truths — the illusion-like veiled truth and the space-like ultimate truth — which are to be understood and realized. The thirty-four arms plus the body, speech, and mind represent the thirty-seven harmonies with awakening, which are the path for comprehending the two truths. The four doors of Yamāntaka's maṇḍala represent the purification of the four establishments of mindfulness, the purification of the four supreme strivings, the purification of the four basis of spiritual power, and the purification of the five powers.

Furthermore, the primordial wisdom of great bliss is explained in relation to the thirty-seven harmonies, but with different designations. Its functions are similar to those of the thirty-seven harmonies. Therefore a tantric practitioner must have complete understanding of the thirty-seven harmonies in order to have the proper basis to visualize these aspects of the deity and the maṇḍala.

Another reason why we do not hear of many monastics in large Tibetan monastic universities meditating on the thirty-seven harmonies may be because, as explained above, the Perfection of Wisdom and Abhidharma texts present the thirty-seven harmonies as practices accomplished on the five bodhisattva paths. The students may therefore think that these are advanced practices undertaken by practitioners on one of the paths and not by persons like themselves who have not yet entered a path.[137] I noticed in the Pāli texts that the thirty-seven harmonies are often taught for people who are yet to enter a path. This is very good. I think it is very helpful to practice the four establishments of mindfulness before entering a path and before entering the Tantrayāna.

Unfortunately, in the Tibetan community there is widespread belief that geshes consider lamrim as a "small" teaching because there is very little philosophy in it and therefore very little to debate. People also have the incorrect notion that only those geshes and lamas who are not so scholarly teach lamrim, and that when they do teach it, since it is a simple teaching, there is no need to incorporate material from the major Indian philosophical treatises.

This is a sign of degeneration. When Tsongkhapa gave oral transmission or teachings on lamrim, it is likely that he incorporated teachings clarifying intricacies of the great philosophical treatises. I received a copy of a lamrim text composed by one of the teachers of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama, a lama from Amdo named Shamar Gendun Tenzin (1852–1912).[138] After reading a note in the Thirteenth's copy of the book, I concluded that if a teacher is scholarly and highly learned, when he teaches lamrim he will definitely incorporate subtleties of topics from all the major treatises and commentaries. On the other hand, some lamrim texts, such as that by Pabongka Rinpoche, are straightforward, with no complexities or sophistications. I think that neglecting to include material from the great treatises when one teaches lamrim is not a positive sign but an indicator of degeneration that reflects the teacher's level of scholarship and learning.

Tsongkhapa spoke about Buddhists who are rich in study of the great texts yet impoverished regarding practice. Although he said this centuries ago, he is speaking to us

today. This poor state of affairs occurs when we are unable to understand that what we study is actually practical meditation instruction. In the *Great Treatise*, Tsongkhapa even admitted that the number of people who really integrate what he has taught in that text into their practice will be very few. To benefit those who are unable to do that, he composed another, small text, the *Lines of Experience* (*Lam rim bsdus don*), which summarizes the important points so that people could easily apply them to their lives in a practical manner.

In the Tibetan community many people think of meditation or practice as doing tantric sādhanas. This, too, indicates serious degeneration. There are two types of monasteries: those where the monastics study the major Indian treatises and those called "tantric monasteries" where the monastics memorize and perform sādhanas and rituals. For example, the monks in Namgyal Monastery, which is traditionally considered a tantric monastery, memorize one thousand pages, but they do not necessarily understand the meaning. An old monk from Namgyal Monastery once told me, "We are meant to simply recite the texts, not to receive explanations on them." It is very sad that he believed this. I have heard that some Chinese and Japanese Buddhists think similarly — that chanting without understanding or meditating on the meaning is sufficient to carry on the Buddhist tradition. They leave it to the academic scholars to study and understand the meaning. This is very unfortunate. In the last twenty or thirty years, we have made effort in the Tibetan community to improve this situation. Now the monks at Namgyal Monastery also study philosophy. The nuns' education has also greatly improved, and they now study philosophy and dialectics. In December 2016 twenty Tibetan nuns received their geshe degree and many more will follow. Some lay followers are also studying the treatises and engage in debate.

Many people incorrectly believe that the Indian treatises and commentaries are for study, not meditation. For meditation they read short meditation manuals and base their practice on those. In fact, everything we study is material to be examined and practiced in our meditation sessions. If we only needed a few brief teachings for meditation, why did our Teacher, the Buddha, teach for forty-five years and give 84,000 teachings?

In the past, many Tibetans — both laypeople and monastics — developed certain bad habits due to lack of knowledge. This is unfortunate. We cannot consider these habits and views as part of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition or as something to preserve. We must change these things. That is why I emphasize to the Tibetans, Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans who attend my teachings that we are now in the twenty-first century, so we must be twenty-first century Buddhists who don't depend on faith alone but have a reasoned understanding of the Buddhadharma. We must then put what we have learned into practice.

In brief, the traditional style of teaching lamrim has been to teach a lamrim text without incorporating information and practices described in the great Indian treatises. Although some people think this is good, in fact it is a sign of degeneration and needs to be changed. We must bring what is taught in the 108 volumes of the Kangyur and the 225 volumes of the Tengyur into our daily practice. In this way, the thirty-seven harmonies explained in these scriptures will become part of our practice and not just something we study or think about meditating on once we are on the five paths.

For example, in the study of the Perfection of Wisdom sūtras, we learn the 173 aspects of the three knowers. Although these are qualities of the three awakened states — those of śrāvaka and solitary-realizer arhats and buddhas — and are beyond our comprehension, we can still imagine these qualities and train to develop them. Although they are qualities of

awakened states, the 173 aspects of the three knowers must be applied and practiced in our daily life. This is very important.

Many years ago I was giving the oral transmission of the *Eight-Thousand-Line Perfection of Wisdom Sūtra* and the *Ornament of Clear Realizations* in South India. The ex-abbot Pema Gyaltsen attended, and I asked him some questions about the 173 aspects of the three knowers. This great scholar described how all of them could be incorporated into the practices of the twenty applications. I was struck by his precise, wonderful explanation, which I had not seen clearly in the treatises. Perhaps he had written it in his own commentaries on Madhyamaka or logic (*pramāṇa*). In any case, he gave me a different way to think about and practice these 173 in my life. My point is that we should explore whatever we study from numerous viewpoints, relate it to other aspects of the path, and apply it in our daily life.

We now conclude volume 4, which discussed taking refuge in the Three Jewels and, having done so, engaging in the three higher trainings, which are the primary practices leading to nirvāṇa. Although the three higher trainings are expressed in the order of ethical conduct, concentration, and wisdom, such that they sequentially build on one another, in fact they are interrelated. For example, living with ethical conduct is a natural expression of wisdom; someone with wisdom of the ultimate nature automatically respects the law of karma and its effects and the prātimokṣa ethical restraints, as the Buddha illustrated in the example of his life.

Teachings on the thirty-seven harmonies with awakening encapsulate and elaborate on the higher trainings. Ethical conduct, concentration, and wisdom permeate the stages of the path and will appear many times as we study the stages of the path, as we will see in future volumes of the *Library of Wisdom and Compassion*.

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Notes

1. This is similar to the uninterrupted path and liberated path spoken of in the Sanskrit tradition.
2. Another reference to the dhammakāya is found in the *Sutta on the Knowledge of Beginnings* (*Agganna Sutta*, DN 27:9). The monk Vāseṭṭha from the brahmin caste was reviled by other brahmins for having deserted his caste and mixing with those of lower castes when he ordained. Brahmins consider themselves to be the superior caste because according to their beliefs, the brahmin caste was born from Brahmā's mouth. Here the Buddha told his disciples how to describe themselves should brahmins ask:

   > He ... can truly say: "I am a true offspring of the Blessed Lord, born of his mouth, born of Dhamma, created by Dhamma, an heir to Dhamma." Why is that? Because, Vāseṭṭha, this designates the Tathāgata: "The Dhamma body," that is the "body of Brahmā," or "Become Dhamma," that is, "Become Brahmā."

   Here "Brahmā" means "the highest," indicating the Dhamma is the highest truth and the highest attainment.
3. The topic of the Twenty Saṅghas in the *Ornament of Clear Realizations* in the Sanskrit tradition lays out the various stages the eight āryas may pass through en route to arhatship.
4. This version is according to Pabongka Rinpoche.
5. Specifically, the cognitive obscuration spoken of here is āryas' unpolluted actions, which are the subtle motivation to engage in activities that benefit others. This unpolluted karma enables bodhisattvas to take rebirth according to their intention.
6. A buddha's pristine wisdom knowing the diversity and variety of conventionalities also directly knows emptiness, but within the division of a buddha's two pristine wisdoms — one of the ultimate nature, the other of the diversity of phenomena — it is said to be only the latter. A buddha's pristine wisdom knowing the ultimate nature of phenomena — their emptiness — also directly knows all conventionalities although it is called the pristine wisdom knowing the ultimate nature. In short, although both pristine wisdoms are omniscient and know all phenomena and their ultimate nature, they are posited in relation to their chief knowable object.
7. Individual self-knowledge is an ārya's experiential wisdom that directly knows its object — ultimate truth, subtle impermanence, or subtle conventionalities — by itself.
8. In other contexts, the word "deceptive" describes something appearing to be truly existent although it is not. This is not the meaning here.
9. There are many ways to speak of the Three Jewels. This is one way.
10. "Actual jewel" means it fits the definition of that particular jewel.
11. For more about the clear light mind, see chapters 12–14 in *Saṃsāra, Nirvāṇa, and Buddha Nature*, vol. 3 in the *Library of Wisdom and Compassion*.
12. For more about how to select qualified spiritual mentors and how to relate to our spiritual mentors, see chapters 4 and 5 of *The Foundation of Buddhist Practice*, vol. 2 in the *Library of Wisdom and Compassion*.
13. These are, for example, the female counterparts to the four Dhyāni Buddhas.
14. "Wheel of Brahmā" refers to the excellent speech of the Buddha's doctrine.
15. Sometimes the realm of the demi-gods (*asuras*) is mentioned as a sixth class of sentient being.
16. These are the six sensory faculties (five sense and one mental), two regenerative faculties (the disposition to masculinity and femininity that is responsible for the features, demeanor, behavior, and so forth of a male or female), life force, five feeling faculties (mental happiness and unhappiness, physical pleasure and displeasure, neutral feelings), five faculties to separate from the mundane (faith, effort, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom), and three unpolluted faculties (path of seeing, path of meditation, path of no more learning). In general, the first fourteen are involved with cyclic existence (although arhats and buddhas also have the six sensory faculties) and the last eight are causes of liberation and awakening.
17. See chapter 8 for more on the eight liberations and the nine serial absorptions.
18. Geshe Jampa Gyatso, *Commentary to Candrakīrti's Supplement to the "Middle Way,"* unpublished transcript, vol. 7, 1228.
19. These two sūtra citations are from Candrakīrti's *Autocommentary on the Supplement*. See Geshe Jampa Gyatso, *Commentary to Candrakīrti's Supplement to the "Middle Way,"* vol. 7, 1358–59.
20. Commentators have different versions of the syllogisms. The ones presented here are drawn from Longdol Rinpoche Ngawang Lozang.
21. Of the six topics of recollections, the Three Jewels serve as the basis of the path; ethical conduct represents abandoning nonvirtue, generosity represents practicing virtue, and the buddhas and other divine beings are included among the deities. By recollecting the deities, we feel that we are in their presence and that they are witnessing our Dharma practice. In this way, we are inspired and our conscientiousness increases.
22. English translations of this sūtra can be found at http://www.lotsawahouse.org/words-of-the-buddha/sutra-recalling-three-jewels and https://fpmt.org/wp-content/uploads/education/teachings/sutras/sutra_remembering_the_three_jewels_c5.pdf.
23. "Son of the gods" refers to a celestial being from the desire realm who shoots arrows of the five afflictions to bedevil sentient beings. In other cases it refers to conceit.
24. See note 714, MN 1273.
25. This perspective is more general and differs slightly from that of the *Sublime Continuum*, which is from the viewpoint of ārya bodhisattvas.
26. See chapters 4 and 5 in *The Foundation of Buddhist Practice*.
27. Killing, stealing, unwise or unkind sexual behavior, lying, divisive speech, harsh words, idle talk, covetousness, malice, and wrong views.
28. Lay followers can take the eight one-day precepts included in the Prātimokṣa ordinations (discussed in the section below on the Prātimokṣa ethical code). Both monastic and lay followers can take the Eight Mahāyāna Precepts for one day.

29. According to http://www.fpmt.org/golden_light_sutra/pdf/questions.pdf, question 57, "How should I treat or dispose of images of buddhas and bodhisattvas," recite *om ah hum* before burning Dharma papers. Visualize the text dissolving into the syllable *ah*, which represents the Buddha's speech and also represents the ultimate nature, emptiness. Then visualize the *ah* dissolving into you and your mind being unified with its meaning. You may also recite this verse: Om, You that act for the benefit of sentient beings, / you that bestow similar siddhis (attainments), / although you depart for the land of the buddhas, / please return again.

30. See Thubten Chodron, *The Compassionate Kitchen: Buddhist Practices for Eating with Mindfulness and Gratitude* (Boulder, CO: Shambhala Publications, 2018).

31. For more statements on this issue, see https://www.dalailama.com/messages/dolgyal-shugden.

32. Please see The Dalai Lama and Thubten Chodron, *Buddhism: One Teacher, Many Traditions* (Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2014), 66–70, for more information about the precepts and the contents of the Vinaya in each of the three extant traditions.

33. See the *Greater Discourse on the Destruction of Craving* (MN 38) for the example of Sāti, who held wrong views. Unfortunately, he did not recognize his error and did not repent. Nor did Ariṭṭha, the holder of wrong views in the *Simile of the Saw* (MN 22). In both cases, the Buddha rebuked them and explained the errors in their thinking and the consequences of adhering to wrong views. In both cases, although dejected after being rebuked by the Buddha, neither of the monks apologized or publicly relinquished their wrong views. On the other hand, in the *Exposition of the Elements* (MN 140), Pukkusāti apologized profusely after addressing the Buddha as a friend because he did not recognize that the person before him was the Tathāgata.

34. Khensur Jampa Tegchok, *Practical Ethics and Profound Emptiness* (Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2017).

35. Traditionally "Saṅgha" refers to the monastic community, not to a group of lay practitioners.

36. *A Summary of the Means for Accomplishing the Mahāyāna Path* (*Mahāyāna-patha-sādhana-varna-saṃgraha*), in Doboom Tulku and Glenn Mullin, *Atisha and Buddhism in Tibet* (New Delhi: Tibet House, 1983), 48–50.

37. Jan Nattier, *A Few Good Men: The Bodhisattva Path according to The Inquiry of Ugra (Ugraparipṛcchā)* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2003), 263–64.

38. This is according to the Dharmaguptaka Vinaya. The Mūlasarvāstivāda requires twelve bhikṣuṇīs, or six in an outlying area. The Mūlasarvāstivāda calls this an "ordination"; however, no new precepts are received.

39. This refers to the bhikṣu Saṅgha; since Tibetan nuns do not have full ordination, they can provide information to the bhikṣu Saṅgha but cannot take part in the decision-making process.

40. For more information on introducing the bhikṣuṇī ordination into Tibetan Buddhism, see http://www.bhiksuniordination.org/. The booklet *Revival of the Bhikṣuṇī Vow* can be downloaded at http://www.bhiksuniordination.org/pdfs/2016-CBO-booklet.pdf.

41. Sravasti Abbey in the United States is the first training monastery for Western nuns who practice in the Tibetan tradition and have Dharmaguptaka bhikṣuṇī ordination.

42. *Dharmaguptaka Vinaya: Pravrajyā and Śikṣamāṇā Ordination Rites* (Newport WA: Sravasti Abbey, 2017), 12, 16, 38.

43. The colophon for this poem reads: Written in 1973 in the Tegchen Choling, Dharamsala, India, 2517 years after the passing into parinirvāṇa of the Lord Buddha according to the *śrāvaka* tradition, in the water-ox year, 2100 years since the coming of Tibet's revered King Nyatri.

44. Psychic powers may be gained by single-pointed concentration or by mantra recitation. Practitioners with single-pointed concentration will not use their psychic powers to harm others because their gross afflictions have been temporarily suppressed. However, someone with the aspiration to harm others may cultivate psychic powers through mantra recitation and use those powers to harm others. Such was the case with Milarepa, who used his magical powers to kill over thirty people before he encountered the Buddha's teachings and purified his mind. He became a great yogi who attained awakening in that very life.

45. The superknowledges are supernormal powers, clairaudience, knowledge of others' minds, recollection of past lives, and clairvoyance (divine eye).

46. It is said that serenity may be attained in six months in proper retreat circumstances. Of course, this depends on the practitioner's ability, prior preparation, retreat conditions, and so forth.

47. Zhiyi, whose writings are rooted in the classic Indian texts, composed some of the clearest and most important texts on meditation, practiced by meditators in all Chinese traditions. His four major texts on this subject are *The Great Serenity and Insight*, *An Explanation of the Dharma Gateway of the Perfection of Dhyāna*, *Essentials for Practicing Serenity, Insight, and Dhyāna*, and *Six Gates to the Sublime.* These four are found in T46.1911 and 1915–17.

48. The object condition (*ālambana-pratyaya*) is the cognized object. The dominant condition (*adhipati-pratyaya*) for a consciousness is the sense or mental faculty that directly produces the consciousness. The immediately preceding condition (*samanantara-pratyaya*) is the consciousness of the immediately preceding moment. For a visual consciousness perceiving blue, for example, these would be the color blue, the eye faculty, and the moment of consciousness immediately preceding the arising of the visual consciousness perceiving blue. In terms of a mental consciousness, any of the six consciousnesses may serve as the dominant condition.

49. Qi (also chi or ki) is the circulating life force whose existence and properties are the basis of Chinese philosophy and medicine.

50. Zhiyi often quoted Nāgārjuna's lengthy *Commentary to the Great Perfection of Wisdom*, which is not found in the Tibetan canon.

51. Alternatively, after your skeleton expands with bones filling all of space and then contracts to a normal size, imagine the flesh reappearing. First the flesh goes halfway up the legs, then covers the torso, and so on, until only the upper part of the skull is exposed. Inspect the flesh as it reappears. In the second level, the yoga of thorough training, conclude by concentrating on the top half of the skull that is exposed. In the third level, the yoga of complete attention, after the flesh reappears, contemplate the tiny fragment of bone at the midbrow.

52. These are the ten corruptions of insight meditation. See Vism 10.105–28.

53. His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Jeffrey Hopkins, *How to See Yourself as You Really Are* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2007), 107.

54. *'Phro wa* is sometimes translated as "excitement" or "agitation."

55. Some scholars say that coarse restlessness is no longer present on the fourth stage.

56. The terminology in the Sanskrit tradition in this chapter may differ from that in the Pāli tradition. For example, what is called "mundane insight" here is seen as a reflective contemplation in the Pāli tradition. In the Pāli tradition, insight knows impermanence, duḥkha, and selflessness (non-self).

57. See chapter 2 of *Saṃsāra, Nirvāṇa, and Buddha Nature* for a description of the three realms of cyclic existence.

58. There are many types of equanimity, such as the feeling of equanimity and the equanimity of the four immeasurables, and so forth. The equanimity present in the second dhyāna is the virtuous mental factor of even-minded equanimity that balances the mind and its accompanying mental factors.

59. This is mentioned the fourth chapter of Asaṅga's *Śrāvaka Grounds*, which explains the mundane and supramundane path.

60. It seems that there are cases where śrāvakas meditate on grossness and peacefulness, but this is generally done to increase their meditative dexterity.

61. See chapter 1 of *Saṃsāra, Nirvāṇa, and Buddha Nature* for an explanation of the sixteen attributes of the four truths.

62. For more details on the Twenty Saṅghas, see James B. Apple, *Stairway to Nirvana: A Study of the Twenty Samghas Based on the Works of Tsong Kha pa* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2008).

63. In the previous list of mental contemplations, the one of delight was fourth and the one of analysis was fifth.

64. Also see Napper, *Traversing the Spiritual Path*.

65. *Anāgamya* may also be translated as the "not-unable preparation."

66. See chapter 2 in *Saṃsāra, Nirvāṇa, and Buddha Nature* for more on the realms of saṃsāra in general and the five pure abodes in particular.

67. To attain an actual dhyāna, Buddhist meditators must have suppressed the nine grades of afflictions of the desire realm, something these stream-enterers and once-returners have not done. Thus alternating dhyāna meditation is done only by nonreturners or arhats who have suppressed all afflictions of the desire realm.

68. Absorptions cultivated to attain the excellent qualities of concentration include those practiced in common with śrāvakas, such as the eight liberations and the ten concentrations that see the entire universe as water, fire, and so on. They also include concentrations unique to bodhisattvas that are cultivated limitlessly and have unimaginable diversity, such as concentrations included in the category of the ten powers and concentrations "that śrāvakas and solitary realizers don't even have the name for, let alone absorb in."

69. There are eleven such concentrations that correspond to the eleven groups of sentient beings whom bodhisattvas especially take care to benefit, as mentioned in the bodhisattva's ethical conduct of benefiting others.

70. According to the *Treasury of Knowledg*e, whose explanation of the bodhisattva path differs from the Mahāyāna explanation, the concentration of the stream of Dharma is attained by a bodhisattva on the path of accumulation who employs this concentration to pass through the remaining four bodhisattva paths in a single meditation session to attain buddhahood. This is how this text explains the path the Buddha traversed in his lifetime.

71. Tantric practitioners may initially meditate according to the Cittamātra view. When they have gained stability on the generation stage and have reached a stage called "the slight falling of wisdom," to progress further they must adopt the Madhyamaka view.

72. The first two texts are found only in Chinese, but in recent decades efforts have been made to translate the *Mahāvibhāṣā* into Tibetan. For more about the eight liberations and nine serial absorptions, see *The Explanation Ornament of the Essence along with (i) the Root Text of the Treatise of Quintessential Instructions of the Perfection of Wisdom: Ornament for Clear Realization and (ii) the Commentary Clear Meaning*, trans. Toh Sze Gee (Pomaia, Italy: FPMT Masters Program, 2015), 345–47.

73. In the Pāli sutras, liberations 4–7 are called "abiding peacefully in the present life." The four dhyānas are called "happy" or "pleasant abidings."

74. It seems like these bodhisattvas have already traversed the śrāvaka path and possess actual dhyānas.

75. Also see Anālayo, *From Craving to Liberation*, 141–48.

76. These signs are explained in the following chapter. See also "learning sign" and "counterpart sign" in the glossary.

77. For more on śrāvakas' leap-over absorption see *Vasubandhu, "Treasury of Manifest Knowledge" [and] First Dalai Lama Gedun Drup, "Clarifying the Path to Liberation*," review by Geshe Jampa Gyatso (Pomaia, Italy: FPMT Masters Program, 2008–2013), 283–84.

78. For more on the bodhisattvas' leap-over absorption, see Jeffrey Hopkins and Jongbok Li, *Ngag-wang-pal-dan's Explanation of the Treatise "Ornament for the Clear Realizations" from the Approach of the Meaning of the Words: The Sacred Word of Maitreyanātha* (Dyke, VA: UMA Institute for Tibetan Studies, n.d.), 411–15. See also Tsongkhapa's *Golden Garland* (*Gser gyi phreng*).

79. Unless otherwise mentioned, "access concentration" refers to the preparatory stages of the first dhyāna.

80. The *Discourse on the Fruits of the Homeless Life* (Sāmaññaphala, DN 2.83) describes knowledge and vision (ñāṇadassana) as follows: The meditator who has attained the fourth dhyāna "directs and inclines his mind toward knowledge and vision. He knows, 'This my body is material, made up of the four great elements, born of mother and father, fed on rice and gruel, impermanent, liable to be injured and abraded, broken and destroyed; and this is my consciousness, which is bound to it and dependent on it.'" The mind-made body is described in the next section.

81. This is according to Vism and Pāli commentaries.

82. The *Ornament of Clear Realizations*, which extensively discusses the superknowledges, is written from the Svātantrika Madhyamaka viewpoint, which asserts that the afflictive obscurations and cognitive obscurations are abandoned simultaneously at buddhahood. For that reason, the Svātantrikas say this superknowledge is present in the mindstreams of śrāvaka arhats who have an actual dhyāna. Bodhisattvas who are definite in the Mahāyāna lineage — that is, they enter the Mahāyāna directly without becoming ṣrāvaka arhats — attain this superknowledge at buddhahood.

83. The Aṅguttara Nikāya Commentary (II 119) says, "One-pointedness of mind is called serenity." According to the Majjhima Nikāya Commentary (II 346), serenity is "the eight attainments (the eight meditative absorptions) that are the basis for insight." The Udāna Commentary says (233): "The eight attainments together with access [concentration], which serve as the basis for insight, are called mundane samādhi." Since I don't think the commentaries would drive a wedge between samādhi and samatha, they would certainly say that samatha includes access concentration. Bhikkhu Bodhi, personal correspondence, July 4, 2018.

84. Not all of these meditation objects are unique to Buddhism; meditators of other sects at the Buddha's time used the kasiṇas and the four formless states.

85. *Kaṣina* means "totality" or "entirety."

86. It seems that the access concentration spoken of in the Pāli tradition and the preparatory stages (*sāmantaka*) spoken of in the Sanskrit tradition refer to the same thing. Each of the four dhyānas has preparatory stages or access concentration that precedes it.

87. Some teachers instruct students to focus on the rise and fall of the abdomen while breathing, but this does not lead to serenity. According to Bhikkhu Bodhi: "Observation of the rise and fall of the abdomen has, to my knowledge, never been taught as a samatha practice. The observation of the abdomen arose in a lineage of Burmese meditation masters (though it might go back even to Indian teachers in an oral lineage) as a way to move quickly and directly into vipassanā meditation. If one were to observe the rise and fall of the abdomen, I doubt that one could obtain the proper nimitta of the object, because the focus of observation is too large and is always in motion. It is, however, possible that for certain meditators, as they observe the rise and fall of the abdomen, the mind settles down and reaches a preliminary stage of concentration. If they have practiced samatha meditation successfully in a past existence — that is, [have attained] access concentration or dhyāna — the mind might cast up a nimitta, arising from the depths of the subconscious, and the meditator might then turn away from the rise and fall of the abdomen and focus on the nimitta." Personal correspondence, December 29, 2008.

88. How to do this will be discussed in a future volume. See the Dalai Lama's *Healing Anger: The Power of Patience from a Buddhist Perspective*, trans. Thupten Jinpa (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 1997) and Thubten Chodron's *Working with Anger* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 2001). See also chapter 9 in Vism (Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli's translation of Buddhaghosa in *The Path of Purification*).

89. Bhikkhu Bodhi said, "It seems that when using this meditation, the counterpart sign as described in relation to kasiṇa meditation and ānāpānasati (mindfulness of breathing) does not appear. Some meditators who use *mettā-bhāvanā* (meditation on love) have told me that they do perceive the colored nimitta, but it seems to me that if one switches from love to the colored nimitta one is no longer practicing mettā-bhāvanā, but kasiṇa meditation, using a mentally perceived form as the object." Private correspondence, January 1, 2008.

90. Although Buddhaghosa encourages developing the four divine abodes toward all sentient beings, the first dhyāna can be attained without all beings in all directions being the object. "The object of any of the four divine abodes is a single living being or many living beings, as a mental object consisting in a concept." (Vism 314)

91. See chapter 2 of *Saṃsāra, Nirvāṇa, and Buddha Nature*.

92. This is the sequence according to the commentaries. Some individual meditators have reported that they go into access concentration, enter the first dhyāna, and from there attain the second dhyāna.

93. In personal correspondence (August 31, 2008), I asked Bhikkhu Bodhi for his thoughts on why this is and he responded: "This reflects the commentarial understanding of the way the four establishments of mindfulness are to be practiced, perhaps related to the commentarial understanding of jhāna (dhyāna) as a state in which self-reflection on one's own experience cannot occur while one is in the state itself. In this interpretation, jhāna is a state of utter absorption in the object and thus precludes reflection on and introspective knowledge of one's own experience. I'm not sure that this is entailed by the canonical presentations on jhāna and the four *satipaṭṭhānas*. It seems that, according to the Nikāyas, in the jhānas one *can* reflect on (not "think of," but look back at) one's immediate experience. Thus the second and third satipaṭṭhānas partly involve an evaluation of experience, in terms of one's feelings and states of mind, as one moves from ordinary consciousness toward, and then *into*, jhāna.

"But in the Vism view, since feelings and mind-states are things that are constantly arising and passing away, to objectify them in meditation means that one has a changing object of awareness, and this cannot be the object of jhāna, which must be an unchanging object, the nimitta. Therefore, according to Buddhaghosa, they have to be objects of contemplation leading to vipassanā (insight) or paññā (wisdom), but not jhāna. This is the way I would understand the reason behind the statement at Vism 9.113."

94. The Sanskrit traditions agrees with what Bhikkhu Bodhi said, that those on the śrāvaka path can develop insight and attain arhatship on the basis of access concentration without gaining dhyāna.

95. See Vism 21.111–12.

96. Since the breath is constantly changing, it cannot be the meditation object of serenity. However, focusing on the breath generates a sign, which does not change, and this is the actual observed object when cultivating serenity.

97. See Vism 21.112ff.

98. The Chinese word "Chan" and Japanese word "Zen" are translations of the Sanskrit "dhyāna" and the Pāli "jhāna."

99. This is opposite in the Tibetan tradition.

100. A crore is 10 million.

101. Tibetan meditators attribute these symptoms to *loong*, an imbalance of the internal energy winds in the body. This disorder can cause uncomfortable physical sensations, mental distress, and moodiness.

102. Chu-hung and Tsung-pen, *Pure Mind, Pure Land*, trans. J. C. Cleary (New York: Sūtra Translation Committee of the United States and Canada, 1994), 135.

103. The two *Knowledges* are Vasubandhu's *Treasury of Knowledge* and Asaṅga's *Compendium of Knowledge.*

104. English translations for the term *saṃprajanya* vary: alertness, clear knowing, vigilance, clear comprehension, and so forth.

105. The following citations are from this text. This and other quotations below from Asaṅga in the *Śrāvakabhūmi* and *Compendium of Knowledge* were translated by Boaz Amichay (private correspondence).

106. The major difference between this and Asaṅga's passage is that the later says "removing fatigue and sleepiness," whereas the Pāli sūtra says "defecating and urinating."

107. See chapter 3 in *The Foundation of Buddhist Practice* to learn about conceptual and nonconceptual minds.

108. Although phenomena include all existents, in the four establishments mindfulness of mental factors is predominant. Thus their being continuums of moments of consciousness is emphasized.

109. See *Approaching the Buddhist Path*, 205–7, for the explanation of these four principles.

110. According to the Pāli commentary to MN, in the context of mindfulness of breathing, "internally" refers to the breathing in one's own body, "externally" to the breathing in the body of another person, and "both internally and externally" means contemplating the two alternately. In terms of the other body contemplations, the explanation of inner, outer, and both differs according to the object contemplated.

111. See chapter 1 of *The Foundation of Buddhist Practice* for more on the four seals.

112. See chapter 1 of *Saṃsāra, Nirvāṇa, and Buddha Nature* for more on the four distorted conceptions and the four truths.

113. Interestingly, in the *Establishment of Mindfulness Sutta* in the *Middle Length Discourses* in the Chinese canon, mindfulness of the body in the four postures comes before mindfulness of breathing. Perhaps the emphasis there is to be mindful of the body first while the body is in gross and active positions, and then progress to mindfulness of the body in formal meditation posture. Bhikkhu Anālayo has done a careful comparison of different versions of the sūtra in his books *Perspectives on Satipaṭṭhāna* (Cambridge, UK: Windhorse Publications, 2014) and *Satipaṭṭhāna: The Direct Path to Realization* (Birmingham, UK: Windhorse Publications, 2003).

114. This is a liquid found mostly on the palms and soles of the feet.

115. Other sūtras that relate to mindfulness of the body are MN 28, MN 62, MN 119, MN 140, and DN 22.

116. For more on the twelve links of dependent origination, see chapters 7 and 8 of *Saṃsāra, Nirvāṇa, and Buddha Nature*.

117. It seems that the earliest descriptions of the mindfulness of phenomena contained only two categories: the five hindrances and seven awakening factors. As an example, some scholars point out that only these two are found in the explanation of mindfulness of phenomena in the Pāli *Vibhaṅga*, the second Abhidharma text. Others say that this section evolved and expanded over time. The *Great Sutta on the Establishments of Mindfulness* (DN 22) contains a more expansive explanation of the mindfulness of phenomena, defining many of the terms that are commonly found in descriptions of the four truths and the eightfold path.

118. This refers to the desire found in the desire realm.

119. Tibetan translators often translate *upādāna* (T. *len pa*) in this context as "appropriated," as in "the five appropriated aggregates." Regardless of the translation, the meaning is the same in both traditions.

120. *Saṃskāra* (P. *saṅkhāra*) is also translated as "compositional factors" or "volitional formations."

121. See chapter 7 of *Saṃsāra, Nirvāṇa, and Buddha Nature*.

122. For more about the fetters, see chapter 3 of *Saṃsāra, Nirvāṇa, and Buddha Nature*.

123. See chapters 7 and 8 of *Saṃsāra, Nirvāṇa, and Buddha Nature* for an explanation of the twelve links of dependent origination.

124. See chapters 13 and 14 in *Saṃsāra, Nirvāṇa, and Buddha Nature*.

125. The Sanskrit term is *samyak pradhāna* or *samyak prahāṇa*. The Pāli term is *sammāpadhāna*. All of these terms may be translated into English as "supreme (or right) striving" or "supreme exertion." *Pradhāṇa* was translated into Tibetan as *spong ba* — in English, "abandonment." Tibetans call these the four supreme abandonments, saying that this is a case of the name of one point — the second one, "abandoning nonvirtues already generated" — being given to the entire set. They describe the first one as abandoning letting nonvirtues arise in the future and the last two as abandoning not enhancing virtues that have been generated, and abandoning not generating new virtues in the future. To do this, nonaspiration, noneffort, nonintention, and nonwisdom must be abandoned. However, it is clear from the meaning of these four factors, as well as from the Pāli and Chinese translation of the term and fact that the path factor of joyous effort is described as these four supreme strivings (see MN 141), that *pradhāna* (P. *padhāna*) is the correct reading and "striving" or "exertion" is the correct translation of the set.

126. The four floods are (1) *desire*, which includes the afflictions of the desire realm except for ignorance; (2) *existence*, which includes the afflictions of the form and formless realms except ignorance. Existence also refers to interest in being born in the form and formless realms and the tenth of the twelve links that leads to rebirth there; (3) *ignorance*, and (4) *wrong views*.

127. When used in the technical Abhidharmic sense, as we're using it here, supramundane (*lokottara*, *lokuttara*) refers only to nine phenomena: the four supramundane paths, their four respective fruits, and nirvāṇa. Sometimes teachers may use it in a general sense as that which is conducive to or tends toward liberation, in contrast to that which brings a good rebirth and happiness in saṃsāra.

128. See the section "Reliable Cognizers Based on Authoritative Testimony" in chapter 2 of *The Foundation of Buddhist Practice*.

129. Padmakara Translation Group, *Nagarjuna's "Letter to a Friend"* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 2005), 45.

130. The Sanskrit and Pāli word for "breakthrough" is *abhisamaya*, which is often translated as "clear realization."

131. Imperceptible forms are discussed in chapter 12 of *The Foundation of Buddhist Practice*.

132. All of the following offset quotations defining the eight path factors are from SN 45.8.

133. Nirvāṇa is both the state of cessation in which true duḥkha and true origins of duḥkha have been eliminated, and reality, the object of meditation of an ārya's meditative equipoise. Here nirvāṇa is the latter. See *Saṃsāra, Nirvāṇa, and Buddha Nature*, chapter 11.

134. In MN 44:15 investigation and analysis are considered verbal formations because they are a type of thought, and a person first thinks about what to say and then speaks.

135. See chapter 1 of *The Foundation of Buddhist Practice* for more on the four seals.

136. See Bhikshu Dharmamitra's "The Ten Bodhisattva Grounds," 71.

137. To enter the śrāvaka or solitary-realizer path, one must have stable renunciation that day and night seeks liberation. To enter the bodhisattva path requires uncontrived renunciation and bodhicitta.

138. The Fourth Amdo Shamar, Gendun Tenzin Gyatso, *Stages of the Path* (*Zhwa dmar lam rim*).

Glossary

absolutism (*eternalism* or *permanence*, *śāśvatānta*). The belief that phenomena inherently exist.

absorption of cessation (*nirodha-samāpatti*). An abstract composite in an ārya's continuum in which coarse feelings and discriminations associated with the subtle mental primary consciousness have ceased.

abstract composites (*viprayukta-saṃskāra*). Impermanent phenomena that are neither forms nor consciousnesses.

access. See preparatory stages for a dhyāna.

access concentration (P. *upacāra samādhi*). A level of concentration that prepares the mind to enter the next actual dhyāna.

actual dhyāna (T. *bsam gten gyi dngos gzha*). A more refined dhyānic concentration attained upon completing its preparatory stages.

afflictions (*kleśa*). Mental factors that disturb the tranquility of the mind. These include disturbing emotions and wrong views.

afflictive obscurations (*kleśāvaraṇa*). Obscurations that mainly prevent liberation; afflictions and their seeds.

aggregates (*skandha*). The four or five components that make up a living being: form (except for beings born in the formless realm), feelings, discriminations, miscellaneous factors, and consciousnesses.

analytical meditation (*vicārabhāvanā*, T. *dpyad sgom*). Meditation done to understand an object.

arhat. Someone who has eliminated all afflictive obscurations and attained liberation.

ārya (P. *ariya*). Someone who has directly and nonconceptually realized the emptiness of inherent existence; someone who is on the path of seeing, meditation, or no-more-learning.

ārya buddha. A person who is fully awakened, such as an enjoyment body or emanation body.

ārya learner. A person who has realized emptiness directly but is not a buddha.

bardo (*antarābhava*). The intermediate state between one life and the next.

basis of designation. The collection of parts or factors in dependence on which an object is designated.

bodhicitta. A main mental consciousness induced by an aspiration to bring about others' welfare and accompanied by an aspiration to attain full awakening oneself. It marks entry into the Mahāyāna.

bodhisattva. Someone who has genuine bodhicitta.

bodhisattva ground. A consciousness in the continuum of an ārya bodhisattva characterized by wisdom and compassion. It is the basis for the development of good qualities and the basis for the eradication of ignorance and mistaken appearances.

buddha. All aspects of a buddha. It includes the four buddha bodies.

capable preparation (*not-unable*, *anāgamya*, T. *nyer bsdogs mi lcog med*). A preparation of the first dhyāna that is so called because it is able to serve as the mental basis for supramundane paths.

causal meditative absorption. The meditative absorption attained as a human being that causes rebirth in the form or formless realms.

causally concordant result. The karmic result that corresponds to its cause. It is of two types: the result similar to the cause in terms of our experience and the result similar to the cause in terms of our habitual behavior.

cognitive faculty (*indriya*). The subtle material in the gross sense organ that enables perception of sense objects; for the mental consciousness, it is a previous moment of any of the six consciousnesses.

cognitive obscurations (*jñeyāvaraṇa*). Obscurations that mainly prevent full awakening; the latencies of ignorance and the subtle dualistic view that they give rise to.

collection of merit (*puṇyasaṃbhāra*). A bodhisattva's practice of the method aspect of the path that accumulates merit.

concentration (*samādhi*). A mental factor that dwells single-pointedly for a sustained period of time on one object; a state of deep meditative absorption; single-pointed concentration that is free from discursive thought.

conceptual appearance (*artha-sāmānya*, T. *don spyi*). A mental image of an object that appears to a conceptual consciousness.

conceptual consciousness (*kalpanā*). A consciousness knowing its object by means of a conceptual appearance.

concomitant (T. *mtshungs ldan*). Accompanying or occurring together in the same mental state.

consciousness (*jñāna*). That which is clear and cognizant.

conventional existence (*saṃvṛtisat*). Existence.

conventional truths (*saṃvṛtisatya*). That which is true only from the perspective of grasping true existence. It includes all phenomena except ultimate truths. Syn. veiled truth.

counterpart sign (P. *paṭbhāga-nimitta*). The meditation object of a dhyāna consciousness; a conceptual object that arises on the basis of a visible object.

cyclic existence (*saṃsāra*). The cycle of rebirth that occurs under the control of afflictions and karma.

death (*maraṇabhava*). The last moment of a lifetime when the subtlest clear-light mind manifests.

defilement (*mala*, T. *dri ma*). Either an afflictive obscuration or a cognitive obscuration.

deity (*iṣṭadevatā*, T. *yi dam*). A manifestation of the awakened mind that is meditated on in Tantra.

dependent arising (*pratītyasamutpāda*). This is of three types: (1) causal dependence — things arising due to causes and conditions, (2) mutual dependence — phenomena existing in relation to other phenomena, and (3) dependent designation — phenomena existing by being merely designated by terms and concepts.

desire realm (*kāmadhātu*). One of the three realms of cyclic existence; the realm where sentient beings are overwhelmed by attraction to and desire for sense objects.

deva. A being born as a heavenly being in the desire realm or a being born in the form or formless realm.

dhyāna (P. *jhāna*). A meditative absorption of the form realm.

dry-insight arhats. Those who have attained arhatship on the basis of momentary concentration or access concentration, without having actualized the dhyānas.

dualistic appearance. The appearance of subject and object as separate or the appearance of inherent existence.

duḥkha (P. *dukkha*). Unsatisfactory experiences of cyclic existence.

Dzogchen. A tantric practice emphasizing meditation on the nature of mind, practiced primarily in the Nyingma tradition.

eight worldly concerns (*aṣṭalokadharma*). Attachment or aversion regarding material gain and loss, fame and disrepute, praise and blame, pleasure and pain.

emanation body (*nirmāṇakāya*). The buddha body that appears as an ordinary sentient being to benefit others.

emptiness (*śūnyatā*). The lack of inherent existence, lack of independent existence.

enjoyment body (*saṃbhogakāya*). The buddha body that appears in the pure lands to teach ārya bodhisattvas.

establishments of mindfulness (*smṛtyupasthāna*, *satipaṭṭhāna*, T. *dran pa nyer bzhag*). One of the seven sets of practices comprising the thirty-seven harmonies with awakening. It

focuses mindfulness on the body, feelings, mind, and phenomena.

exalted knower (*jñāna*, T. *mkhyen pa*). A realization of someone who has entered a path. It exists from the path of accumulation to the buddha ground. Exalted knower, path, ground, pristine wisdom, and clear realization are mutually inclusive.

existent (*sat*). That which is perceivable by mind.

fetters (*saṃyojana*). Factors that keep us bound to cyclic existence and impede the attainment of liberation. The five lower fetters — view of a personal identity, deluded doubt, view of rules and practices, sensual desire, and malice — bind us to rebirth in the desire realm. The five higher fetters — desire for existence in the form realm, desire for existence in the formless realm, arrogance, restlessness, and ignorance — prevent a nonreturner from becoming an arhat.

five dhyānic factors. Investigation (*vitarka*, *vitakka*), analysis (*vicāra*, *vicāra*), joy (*prīti*, *pīti*), bliss (*sukha*), and one-pointedness of mind (*ekāgratā*, *ekaggatā*).

five heinous crimes (*ānantārya*). Killing one's mother, father, or an arhat, wounding a buddha, and causing schism in the Saṅgha.

five hindrances (*āvaraṇa*, T. *sgrib pa*). Hindrances that interfere with attaining serenity: sensual desire (*kāmacchanda*), malice (*vyāpāda*, *byāpāda*), lethargy and sleepiness (*styāna-middha*, *thīna-middha)*, restlessness and regret (*auddhatya-kaukṛtya*, *uddhacca-kukkucca*), and deluded doubt (*vicikitsā*, *vicikicchā*).

form body (*rūpakāya*). The buddha body in which a buddha appears to sentient beings; it includes the emanation and enjoyment bodies.

form realm (*rūpadhātu*). A realm in saṃsāra in which the beings have subtle bodies; they are born there by having attained various states of concentration.

formless realm (*ārūpyadhātu*). The realm in saṃsāra in which sentient beings do not have a material body and abide in deep states of concentration.

four seals (*caturmudrā*). Four views that make a philosophy Buddhist: all conditioned phenomena are transient, all polluted phenomena are duḥkha, all phenomena are empty and selfless, nirvāṇa alone is true peace.

four truths of the āryas (*catvāry āryasatyāni*). The truth of duḥkha, its origin, its cessation, and the path to that cessation.

full awakening (*samyaksaṃbodhi*). Buddhahood; the state where all obscurations have been abandoned and all good qualities developed limitlessly.

fundamental innate mind of clear light (T. *gnyug ma lhan cig skyes pa'i 'od gsal gyi sems*). The subtlest level of mind.

Fundamental Vehicle. The vehicle leading to the liberation of śrāvakas and solitary realizers.

god (*deva*). A being born as a heavenly being in the desire realm or in the form or formless realms.

grasping inherent existence (*svabhāvagraha*). Grasping persons and phenomena to exist truly or inherently; syn. grasping true existence.

grasping true existence (*true-grasping*, *satyagrāha*). Grasping persons and phenomena to exist truly or inherently.

harmonies with awakening (*bodhipākṣya-dharma*, *bodhipakkhiya-dhamma*). Thirty-seven practices condensed into seven sets that lead to liberation and awakening.

hell being (*nāraka*). A being born in an unfortunate realm of intense physical pain due to strong destructive karma.

hungry ghost (*preta*). A being born in one of the unfortunate realms who suffers from intense hunger and thirst.

ignorance (*avidyā*). A mental factor that is obscured and grasps the opposite of what exists. There are two types: ignorance regarding ultimate truth and ignorance regarding karma and its effects.

impermanent (*anitya*, *anicca*). Momentary; not remaining in the next moment.

inferential cognizer (*anumāna*). A mind that ascertains its object by means of a correct syllogism.

inherent existence (*svabhāva*). Existence without depending on any other factors; independent existence.

insight (*vipaśyanā*, *vipassanā*, T. *lhag mthong*). A wisdom of thorough discrimination of phenomena conjoined with special pliancy induced by the power of analysis.

insight knowledge (P. *vipassanā-ñāṇa*). Knowledge of the three characteristics gained through insight.

introspective awareness (*saṃprajanya*, *sampajañña*). An intelligence that causes one to engage in activities of body, speech, or mind heedfully.

karma. Intentional (volitional) action; it includes intention karma (mental action) and intended karma (physical and verbal actions motivated by intention).

karmic seeds. The potencies from previously created actions that will bring their results.

knowable (*jñeya*). That which is suitable to serve as an object of an awareness.

latencies (*vāsanā*). Predispositions, imprints, or tendencies.

leapover meditative absorption (*vyukrāntaka-samāpatti*, T. *thod rgyal gyi snyoms 'jug*). A meditative absorption in which the eight serial absorptions are alternated with the absorption or cessation and with a desire-realm mind.

learning sign (P. *uggaha-nimitta*). A subtler object that replaces the preliminary sign when the meditator sees the mental image of something — a kasiṇa, for example — as clearly with closed eyes as with open eyes looking at it.

liberated path. A wisdom directly realizing emptiness that has completely eradicated a portion of defilements; a path that has temporarily suppressed a portion of the manifest afflictions.

liberation (*mokṣa*, T. *thar pa*). A true cessation that is the abandonment of afflictive obscurations; nirvāṇa, the state of

freedom from cyclic existence.

liberation (*vimokṣa*, *vimokkha*, T. *rnam thar*). The eight liberations, which are the mind's temporary release from defilements that is brought about by mastering certain meditative skills.

liberation (*vimukti*, *vimutti*, T. *rnam grol*). Sanskrit tradition: Complete freedom from saṃsāra; Pāli tradition: a conditioned event that brings nirvāṇa.

Mahāmudrā. A type of meditation that focuses on the conventional and ultimate natures of the mind.

Māra. Four corrupting forces: (1) the afflictions, (2) five aggregates, twelve sense sources, and eighteen constituents, (3) death, and (4) a god in the desire realm who interferes with our creation of virtue.

meditative equipoise on emptiness. An ārya's mind focused single-pointedly on the emptiness of inherent existence.

mental consciousness (*mano-vijñāna*). A primary consciousness that knows mental phenomena in contradistinction to sense primary consciousnesses that know physical objects.

mental contemplation (*manaskāra*, T. *yid la byed pa*). A mind that meditates on either grossness and subtleness or on the four truths in order to attain either the dhyānas or the union of serenity and insight on emptiness.

mental factor (*caitta*). An aspect of mind that accompanies a primary consciousness and fills out the cognition, apprehending particular attributes of the object or performing a specific function.

mind (*citta*). That which is clear and aware; the part of living beings that cognizes, experiences, thinks, feels, and so on. In some contexts it is equivalent to primary consciousness.

mind-made body (P. *manomaya-kāya*). A physical body, created with a mind of dhyāna, that is an exact replica of the meditator's own body.

mindfulness (*smṛti*, *sati*). A mental factor that brings to mind a phenomenon of previous acquaintance without forgetting it

and prevents distraction to other objects.

mindstream (*cittasaṃtāna*). The continuity of mind.

momentary (*kṣaṇika*). Not enduring to the next moment.

momentary concentration (P. *khaṇika-samādhi*). Concentration developed by directing mindfulness to the changing states of mind and body, noting any phenomenon that appears. While not at the depth of an actual dhyāna, śrāvakas may use it to attain arhatship.

monastic. Someone who has received monastic ordination; a monk or nun.

nature truth body (*svabhāvika dharmakāya*). The buddha body that is the emptiness of a buddha's mind and that buddha's true cessations.

nihilism (*ucchedānta*). The belief that our actions have no ethical dimension; the belief that nothing exists.

nimitta. The sign or mental image that is the object for cultivating serenity. It is of three types: the preliminary, learning, and counterpart nimittas.

nine stages of sustained attention (*navākārā cittasthiti*, T. *sems gnas dgu*). Stages of concentration on the way to attaining serenity.

nirvāṇa. The state of liberation of an arhat; the purified aspect of a mind that is free from afflictions.

nirvāṇa without remainder (*anupadhiśeṣa-nirvāṇa*, *anupādisesa-nibbāna*). (1) The state of liberation when an arhat has passed away and no longer has the remainder of the polluted aggregates; (2) an ārya's meditative equipoise on emptiness when there is no appearance of true existence.

nonaffirming negative (*prasajyapratiṣedha*, T. *med dgag*). The mere absence of the object of negation. A negative phenomenon in which, upon the explicit elimination of the object of negation by an awareness, another phenomenon is not suggested or established.

nonconceptual consciousness. A consciousness that knows its object directly, not by means of a conceptual appearance.

nondeceptive (*avisaṃvādi*). Incontrovertible, correct.

nonexistent (*asat*). That which is not perceivable by mind.

object (*viṣaya*, T. *yul*). That which is known by an awareness.

object of negation (*pratiṣedhya*). What is negated or refuted.

observed object (*ālambana*, T. *dmigs pa*). The basic object that the mind refers to or focuses on while apprehending certain aspects of that object.

one final vehicle. The belief that all beings — even śrāvakas who have become arhats — will eventually enter the Mahāyāna and become buddhas.

ordinary being (*pṛthagjana*, T. *so so skye bo*). Someone who is not an ārya.

path (*mārga*, T. *lam*). An exalted knower that is conjoined with uncontrived renunciation.

path of accumulation (*sambhāramārga*, T. *tshogs lam*). First of the five paths. It begins when one aspires for liberation day and night for a śrāvaka path or when one has spontaneous bodhicitta for the Mahāyāna path.

path of meditation (*bhāvanāmārga*, T. *sgom lam*). The fourth of the five paths. This begins when a meditator begins to eradicate innate afflictions from the root.

path of no-more-learning (*aśaikṣamārga*, T. *mi slob lam*). The last of the five paths; arhatship or buddhahood.

path of preparation (*prayogamārga*, T. *sbyor lam*). The second of the five paths. It begins when a meditator attains the union of serenity and insight on emptiness.

path of seeing (*darśanamārga*, T. *mthong lam*). Third of the five paths. It begins when a meditator first has direct, nonconceptual realization of the emptiness of inherent existence.

permanent (*nitya*). Unchanging, static. It does not mean eternal.

permanent, unitary, independent self. A soul or self (*ātman*) asserted by non-Buddhists.

person (*pudgala*). A living being designated in dependence on the four or five aggregates.

pliancy (*tranquility*, *praśrabdhi*, *passaddhi*). A mental factor that enables the mind to apply itself to a constructive object in whatever manner it wishes and dissipates mental or physical rigidity.

polluted (*āsrava*, *āsava*). Under the influence of ignorance or its latencies.

Prāsaṅgika. The Buddhist philosophical tenet system that asserts that all phenomena lack inherent existence both conventionally and ultimately.

prātimokṣa. The different sets of ethical precepts for monastics and lay followers that assist in attaining liberation.

preliminary sign (P. *parikkamma-nimitta*). The initial conceptual appearance of a physical object — for example, a kasiṇa — to the mental consciousness.

preparatory stages for a dhyāna (*access*, *preparations*, *sāmantaka*, T. *bsam gtan po'i nyer bsdogs*). Stages of meditation that prepare the mind to enter the actual dhyāna.

primary consciousness (*vijñāna*). A consciousness that apprehends the presence or basic entity of an object. There are six types of primary consciousness: visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile, and mental.

probing awareness (*reasoning consciousness*, *yuktijñāna*, T. *rigs shes*). A consciousness using or having used reasoning to analyze the ultimate nature of an object. It can be either conceptual or nonconceptual.

proliferations (*prapañca*, *papañca*, T. *spros pa*). Mental fabrications ranging from anxious thoughts to grasping true existence.

pure lands. Places created by the unshakable resolve and merit of buddhas where all external conditions are conducive for Dharma practice.

resultant-birth absorption. The mental and/or physical aggregates of a being born in the form or formless realm due to having attained the comparable level of absorption in a previous life.

ripening result of karma. The karmic result that is rebirth in one of the three realms; the five aggregates a being takes when reborn.

sādhana. The means of achievement expressed in a tantric text or manual that details the steps of visualization and meditation in the practice of a deity.

samādhi. See concentration.

Sautrāntika. A Buddhist tenet system that espouses Fundamental Vehicle tenets.

self (*ātman*). (1) A person; (2) inherent existence.

self-grasping (*ātmagrāha*). Grasping inherent existence.

self-sufficient substantially existent person (T. *gang zag rang rkya thub pa'i rdzas yod*). A self that can be identified independent of the aggregates. Such a self does not exist.

sentient being (*sattva*). Any being that has a mind and is not a buddha.

serenity (*śamatha*, *samatha*). Sanskrit tradition: concentration arisen from meditation that is accompanied by the bliss of mental and physical pliancy in which the mind abides effortlessly without fluctuation for as long as we wish on whatever virtuous object it has been placed. Pāli tradition: one-pointedness of mind, the eight attainments (meditative absorptions) that are the basis for insight.

six perfections (*ṣaḍpāramitā*). The practices of generosity, ethical conduct, fortitude, joyous effort, meditative stability, and wisdom that are motivated by bodhicitta and sealed with the wisdom seeing them as both empty and dependent.

solitary realizer (*pratyekabuddha*). A person following the Fundamental Vehicle who seeks liberation and emphasizes understanding the twelve links of dependent arising.

śrāvaka (*hearer*, P. *sāvaka*). Someone practicing the Fundamental Vehicle path leading to arhatship who emphasizes meditation on the four truths.

stabilizing meditation (*sthāpyabhāvanā*, T. *'jog sgom*). Meditation to focus and concentrate the mind on an object.

substantial cause (*upādāna-kāraṇa*). The cause that becomes the result, as opposed to cooperative causes that aid the substantial cause in becoming the result.

superknowledge (*abhijñā*, *abhiññā*, T. *mngon shes*). Direct, experiential knowledge, of six types: (1) supernormal powers, (2) divine ear, (3) knowledge of others' minds, (4) recollection of past lives, (5) divine eye (includes knowledge of the passing away and rearising of beings and knowledge of the future), and (6) the destruction of the pollutants. The sixth is attained only by liberated beings.

supernormal powers (*ṛddhi*, *iddhi*). The first of the six superknowledges, gained in deep samādhi: to replicate one's body, appear and disappear, pass through solid objects, go under the earth, walk on water, fly, touch the sun and moon with one's hand, go to the Brahmā world, and so forth.

supramundane (*transcendental*, *lokottara*, P. *lokuttara*). Pertaining to the elimination of fetters and afflictions; pertaining to āryas.

taking and giving (T. *gtong len*). A meditation practice for cultivating love and compassion that involves visualizing taking others' suffering, using it to destroy our self-centered attitude, and giving our body, possessions, and merit to others.

tathāgata. A buddha.

tenets (*siddhānta*). A philosophical principle or belief.

thought (*kalpanā*). Conceptual consciousness.

three characteristics. Impermanence, duḥkha, and no-self.

three higher knowledges (*trividyā*, P. *tevijjā*, T. *rig gsum*). The last three superknowledges: recollection of past lives, divine eye, and destruction of the pollutants.

three realms (*tridhātuka*, *tedhātuka*). Desire, form, and formless realms.

true cessation (*nirodhasatya*). The cessation of a portion of afflictions or a portion of cognitive obscurations.

true existence (*satyasat*). Existence having its own mode of being; existence having its own reality.

true knowledge (*vidyā*, *vijjā*). Clear and complete knowledge of the four truths.

truth body (*dharmakāya*). The buddha body that includes the nature truth body and the wisdom truth body. Sometimes it refers only to a buddha's omniscient mind.

twelve links of dependent origination (*dvādaśāṅga-pratītyasamutpāda*). A system of twelve factors that explains how we take rebirth in saṃsāra and how we can be liberated from it.

two truths (*satyadvaya*). Ultimate truths and veiled (conventional) truths.

ultimate nature. The ultimate or deepest mode of existence of persons and phenomena.

ultimate truth (*paramārthasatya*). The ultimate mode of existence of all persons and phenomena; emptiness.

unfortunate realms (*apāya*). Unfortunate states of rebirth as a hell being, hungry ghost, or animal.

uninterrupted path. A wisdom directly realizing emptiness that is in the process of eliminating some portion of defilements; a path that is in the process of temporarily suppressing some portion of manifest afflictions.

union of serenity and insight. Absorption in which the bliss of mental and physical pliancy has been induced by analysis.

unpolluted (*anāsrava*). Not under the influence of ignorance.

veiled truths (*saṃvṛtisatya*). Objects that appear true to ignorance, which is a veiling consciousness; objects that appear to exist inherently to their main cognizer although they do not; syn. conventional truths.

very obscure phenomena (*atyantaparokṣa*). Phenomena that can be known only by relying on the testimony of a reliable person or a valid scripture.

view of a personal identity (*view of the transitory collection*, *satkāyadṛṣṭi*, *sakkāyadiṭṭhi*). Grasping an inherently existent I or mine (according to the Prāsaṅgika system).

Vinaya. Monastic discipline; a body of texts about monastic life, discipline, and conduct.

wind (*prāṇa*, T. *rlung*). One of the four elements; energy in the body that influences bodily functions; subtle energy on which levels of consciousness ride.

wisdom truth body (*jñāna dharmakāya*). The buddha body that is a buddha's omniscient mind.

Further Reading

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The Dalai Lama is the spiritual leader of the Tibetan people, a Nobel Peace Prize recipient, and an advocate for compassion and peace throughout the world. He promotes harmony among the world's religions and engages in dialogue with leading scientists. Ordained as a Buddhist monk when he was a child, he completed the traditional monastic studies and earned his geshe degree (equivalent to a PhD). Renowned for his erudite and open-minded scholarship, his meditative attainments, and his humility, Bhikṣu Tenzin Gyatso says, "I am a simple Buddhist monk."

Peter Aronson

Bhikṣuṇī Thubten Chodron has been a Buddhist nun since 1977. Growing up in Los Angeles, she graduated with honors in history from the University of California at Los Angeles and did graduate work in education at the University of Southern California. After years studying and teaching Buddhism in Asia, Europe, and the United States, she became the founder and abbess of Sravasti Abbey in Washington State. A popular speaker for her practical explanations of how to apply Buddhist teachings in daily life, she is the author of several books on Buddhism, including *Buddhism for Beginners*. She is the editor of Khensur Jampa Tegchok's *Insight into Emptiness*. For more information, visit sravastiabbey.org and https://thubtenchodron.org/books/.

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